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TROUBLES OF ONE NEOPHYTE  
RESEARCHER IN GETTING  
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON  
PARTNERSHIPS IN A DAYCARE  
SETTING WITH DISADVANTAGED  
TODDLERS.

by

Marion Hill-Paterson, 1945 -

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University of Sherbrooke

Abstract

TROUBLES OF ONE NEOPHYTE  
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PARTNERSHIPS IN A TODDLER  
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DISADVANTAGED TODDLERS

by Marion Hill-Paterson

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Problème d'une chercheure néophyte en menant une recherche qualitative sur le partenariat dans un service de garde pour poupons en milieux défavorisés.

Cette étude, de nature réflexive et narrative, porte sur les problèmes vécus et les obstacles rencontrés par une chercheure néophyte en s'engageant dans une recherche qualitative sur le partenariat entre des familles défavorisées et les éducateurs d'un service de garde destiné aux poupons. L'analyse est centrée sur la manière dont un partenariat entre ces deux milieux peut influencer les soins aux poupons aux yeux des parents et des éducateurs, et sur les conflits vécus et perçus par les deux milieux responsables de l'éducation des enfants. Un but secondaire de cette étude a été d'approfondir notre compréhension de la manière dont les programmes de formation des éducateurs au préscolaire peuvent intégrer les résultats de l'étude pouvant préparer les futurs professionnels à travailler avec des familles vivant dans un contexte difficile.

Le sujet a été exploré d'un point de vue qualitatif en référence à un cadre conceptuel éco-systémique. L'étude s'est déroulée sur trois mois dans une garderie à but non

lucrative gérée par des parents. Des récits d'expérience détaillés ont été élaborés à partir des réflexions des participants sur les événements vécus en relation avec la garde de l'enfant. Trois obstacles et conflits principaux ont émergé de l'étude: ils concernent le temps, l'anxiété et les différences de perception entre les parents et les éducateurs. Le mémoire se termine par des conseils aux chercheurs, qui pourraient tenter d'implanter une étude semblable. De même, des suggestions sont offertes pour les programmes de formation en service de garde. Ces suggestions comprennent les réflexions personnelles de la chercheuse, elle-même responsable de formation initiale, à propos des changements qu'elle a intégrés dans ses propres cours.

This study is about the troubles encountered by one researcher in getting qualitative research on partnerships between families, in disadvantaged situations and educators in toddler day care settings and how they affect the quality of care as perceived by parents and educators. The study focuses on the conflicts and tensions as perceived by families and educators. A secondary goal of the study is to develop a greater understanding of how day care training programs might incorporate the findings to prepare day care educators to work with families in disadvantaged circumstances. The study is done through a qualitative lens using an ecological framework. The study spans a three month period and is set up in a non-profit, parent-controlled day care center. Detailed 'narratives of experience' are constructed from the participants' reflections on the events. Three main barriers or conflicts have emerged from the study. They are time, fear and a difference in perceptions between the families and the educators. The thesis concludes with advice to researchers who may be contemplating setting up a similar study and some suggestions are proposed for day care training programs. These suggestions include reflections of the researcher and how she implemented changes in her own teaching.

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# INTRODUCTION

The issue of child care for infants and toddlers in group settings is not new but it has moved in the current decade from being a women's issue to becoming a concern for all of society. The quality of care that young children receive will also affect society in the future as these current toddlers grow to adulthood and take their places in society.

Current research is showing that children in disadvantaged families are at possible risk for later problems in social adaptations. The development of language skills, autonomy and social competence in the early years sets the stage for life-long learning. Furthermore the research is demonstrating that high quality child care is important for all children and may actually provide positive experiences for toddlers from disadvantaged situations. It may even help to lessen the negative effects of poverty (Howes & Hamilton, 1993; Friendly, 1994; Doherty, 1995; Ryerse, 1994). However it is often these same families who are experiencing difficult home situations which place their children in lower quality childcare programs. It may be that these same families, due to the stress and disorganization in their lives do not have the extra energy or knowledge required to find higher quality programs and that these higher quality programs are more expensive. (Goelman & Pence, 1987; Howes & Olenick, 1986; Knotos & Fein, 1987).

The problem of caring for Canada's children has been a political issue in the last three federal elections in Canada. But we still do not have a national child care policy and since 1991, there has been a steady decline in government funding and the rate of growth for child care has slowed to 3.46

percent in 1993 from an annual increase of 16 percent in the 1980's (Status of Day Care, 1994; Friendly, 1994; Wilson, 1997, p. 29).

Most people when entering the field of Early Childhood think that their focus is the child. In addition infant/toddler training programs do not have a long history and the training for early childhood education has evolved from nursery or elementary teacher training. (Howes & Hamilton, p. 329)

But who is daycare for? If we say only care for the child then we are seeing the child in isolation. In the past our training programs have tended to concentrate on training students to work with the young child but we are beginning to realize that our commitment to the well-being of the child must also include a commitment to the well-being of the family. The infant or toddler who enters daycare is part of a unit- 'the family'.

This study is about the 'partnerships' that develop between families, in disadvantaged situations, and educators in toddler daycare settings; how they affect the quality of care as perceived by parents and educators.

A combination of approaches within a qualitative paradigm supports the purpose of the study which is to gain a deeper understanding of the problem of partnerships. The problem is complex and therefore the study focuses on the conflicts and tension as perceived by families and educators. During the process of the research strategies might emerge to provide links between home experiences and daycare experiences. Some of the sources of conflict may be identified. A secondary goal is to develop a greater understanding of how our training programs might use this information to

better prepare early childhood educators to work with families in disadvantaged circumstances.

The study reflects the problems encountered by the researcher and the educators in the daycare setting when beginning the study and attempting to build a partnership and collect data. It should be stated immediately that this study is based to a large extent upon research which did not proceed as it had been planned. Research seldom does, of course, but in this case there is a striking discrepancy between plan and result. This should not be viewed as a failure, but rather as an unforeseen consequence of the research, from which rational conclusions can be drawn. This view will be justified later through detailed descriptions of both the original research plan and the frustrations which flowed from the attempt to implement it.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one defines the terms; then presents the problem and outlines the conceptual framework. Chapter two covers the Review of literature. Chapter three presents the methodology for the study and describes the changes that occurred in the actual research. Chapters four and five describe the "narrative of experiences" of the educators, director and the researcher. A conclusion summarizes the study and the findings.



# Chapter One

## Framing The Study

### 1.1 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS:

Before beginning, it is essential to identify what is meant by daycare, family and disadvantaged in today's context and for the purposes of this study.

#### 1.1.1 DAYCARE:

The term daycare is defined according to the "Act respecting child daycare", Government of Quebec (June, 1995) as child care provided at a location which receives at least seven children on a regular basis for part of a day or for a full day and where children receive care and education by caregivers who are not the primary guardians but whose parent or guardian are unavailable.

Howes & Hamilton (1993) point out that child care is the care of young children by someone other than the mother. This definition is more inclusive than daycare but supports it. In the context of this study daycare refers to a licensed centre as described by these definitions.

### 1.1.2 FAMILY:

Canadian society is evolving and along with this evolution is the change in family structures but the family unit is still an important social unit. In the 1990's the traditional large extended families of the early part of the century are rare ; thus many parents today find themselves working or studying outside the home without the benefits or support systems traditionally offered by family members. Traditional gender roles of parents and grandparents are changing. Many grandparents have their own careers and have busy productive lives while others have taken on the responsibility of raising or helping to raise their grandchildren. Some fathers are struggling with balancing their role as 'breadwinner' and 'nurturer' but they are participating in child rearing roles.

At the same time, mothers are often the 'breadwinners' and studies show that mothers are still fulfilling the majority of the routine work in raising children. When researchers have surveyed working mothers they often talk about how tired they are and how they feel that by the time they arrive at work they have completed a full day's work at home (Wilson, 1997; Friendly, 1994).

Many women, including teen-agers, who find themselves pregnant are deciding to keep and to raise their children either alone or with the father. Statistics show that in the past fifteen years there has been an increase from 11 to 16 % of all families with children under the age of eighteen being

led mostly by a woman. Almost 60% of these lone parent families are existing on low incomes (Chandler, 1995, Interaction, p. 5).

In the decade of the 90's a majority of women are returning to the paid labour force shortly after the birth of their children. The Vanier Institute of the Family in it's 1994 figures reported that over 60% of mothers with children under the age of three are participating in the paid labour force. These figures rise for children between the ages of three to five (Vanier Institute, 1994, p. 72; Status of Day Care Canada, 1994).

Due to the diversity of Canadian families, sociologists and anthropologists are developing new definitions of family. Old definitions of family have focused on the role that the family plays in society. Frequently that role has been to have children to replace dying members of society and to raise these children to become productive members of society. Some governments, such as Quebec, have even developed programs to encourage parents to have more children and thus help to maintain population levels (Shimoni & Baxter, 1996, p. 9). This definition is rather restrictive.

The Vanier Institute of the Family has developed a more inclusive definition of family which concentrates more on what families do rather than on how they look. This definition states that a family can have two or more persons. They can be together because of mutual consent or they can be joined by birth and/or adoption/placement. They can assume responsibility for the physical care, nurturance or socialization of the child or adoption or for procreation. Not all of these criteria need be met however in order to be



considered as a family according to the Vanier Institute (Shimoni & Baxter, 1996, pp. 11-12).

A convincing body of research on quality in early childhood education supports the importance of communication between families and educators. This will be explored in the chapter on the Review of literature.

Families may include traditional-dual earners, single parent, lesbian and gay, blended, common-law, co-habiting with no children, extended families, teen parent(s), older parents, grandparents, foster parents, adoptive families and even loosely joined groups of people.

According to Mandell & Duffy (1995), we need to change our perception of the family as just mother, father and child; they emphasize the idea that families can take many forms. This idea is further explored by Shimoni & Baxter (1996) who support the idea that in order to work effectively with families, we must be open to understanding families in all their diversity (p. 4). They further point out that in order to accept families we must first address our own feelings about "Family" and develop empathy. Through the process of comprehending our own experiences of family, we can become more competent professionals.

The authors then give an overview of some of the roles of family members, such as mother, father, siblings and grandparents. Society's view of the role of the mother is forever changing, as scenarios show that mothers are criticized for staying at home, while those who return to the labour force shortly after giving birth are frequently made to feel guilty for neglecting their motherhood roles. Mothers need support from care givers, but often they too

assign culpability to the mother, blaming her if the toddler experiences difficulty. Research shows that some fathers are taking more active roles in child rearing today, but here again they (Mandell and Duffy) state that there is a "mothering double standard." This denotes the tendency of fathers to claim that they must be doing it "the right way" because that is what their spouses taught them. Mothers are frequently reluctant to let go.

In the daycare situation, educators need to be sensitive towards fathers as well, and include them in partnerships. Birth order is also discussed and the authors also point out that educators, when interacting with families, should also be aware of cultural differences. In some cultures conflicts may be considered normal and helpful in encouraging young children to acquire values that aid in developing skills in sharing and compromise.

Grandparents are taking a very active role today in some families with young children, while in others grandparents are busy with their own lives. As society ages, there are tremendous changes in expectations. Even in other societies, in which grandparents and elders have traditionally played important roles in child-rearing, there are variations, and educators, as professionals, need to understand and support grandparents in their roles in the family.

Rockwell, Andre and Hawley (1996) also support the importance of accepting families and of understanding and appreciating the different cultural and ethnic backgrounds that affect their relationships. Educators need to be consistent in their efforts to interact with families. It is important to foster family strengths and to show compassion when problems develop. This is not always an easy task.

Wilson (1997) promotes the idea that we must be more inclusive when discussing family. She explains that early childhood educators will need to interact with different family forms. A variety of family profiles are explored. Most helpful in understanding these forms are her 'real life scenarios'.

- Single, pregnant teens are frequently choosing to keep their babies; these young parents need support systems.
- 'Older parents'—people who have chosen to postpone having a family until their late thirties or even early forties—constitute another form of family with special needs; these couples may face difficulties in coping with the demands and lifestyle adjustments which the realities of parenthood bring.
- It is not uncommon today to have grandparents, who have already raised their young, to be actively caring for their grandchildren. An estimated 3.5 million Canadian grandparents were raising their grandchildren in 1986 (Wilson, 1997, p. 18).
- Foster parents, that is, families who provide temporary care for a child, is another form of family.
- Sometimes couples—particularly those who are unable to conceive—will adopt one or more children, the larger percentage of whom, Wilson suggests, are from non-domestic sources (Wilson, 1997, p. 20). This means that educators may have children within a family unit from different cultures and races.



- The recent evolution of Canadian society has seen a rise in the number of gay and lesbian families placing children in daycare. Frequently these couples have children from a previous heterosexual relationship.
- In the case of single, separated, or divorced joint-custody parents, whose children may live part of the week with one parent and part with the other, educators will need to remember to include both parents in decisions as they are jointly responsible for the child.
- Single parents often face a lowered economic status and frequently live on the edge of poverty.
- 'Blended families'—married or common-law couples with at least one step-child—face different problems as they try to balance time spent with current children and children from the previous marriage. Often there are feelings of guilt.

Wilson's work helped me realize the diversity of family forms that may place their toddlers in a daycare setting, each of which needs support systems.

These current works all seem to recognize that we must train educators to work with many different types of families and be understanding of their needs.

Families can be understood through the use of various conceptual models but in the Early Childhood profession one model is currently being promoted. A *systems approach* sees the family as an organizational structure, a system, a whole unit, which has interacting parts, such as, the child, the parents- mother, father, other siblings, grandparents, etc. It relies

on a holistic perspective. In other words, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes, each unit interacts and is affected by the other parts and together they form a whole. Pence (1988) suggests that the person's health and well-being is connected to and affected by the environment in which he/she lives and interacts. A child is affected by his parents who are affected by internal and external forces in their environment. A system can be open or closed and this affects how the family will interact with the daycare.

An ecological perspective within this systems approach recognizes that the members, such as, children, parents and siblings are affected by the family system but that the family system also interacts with other systems and affects and in turn is affected by these other systems. Some of these other systems could be the parent's workplace, the neighborhood, the daycare, the school, governments and policies. These internal and external environments overlap or, we could say, are imbedded. In other words, the Daycare is part of the larger system of child care and the early childhood education system. Many authors such as Walsh *et al* (1993), Chandler and Yeates (1994), Shimoni and Baxter (1996), Nyisztor and Rudick (1997) support this view of an ecological model. This approach will be explained in detail later when I present the conceptual framework of the study.

The myth of a family operating as an entity by itself is being torn down as we realize that families interact with the world and are affected in return. Currently we are beginning to realize that the early childhood professional team within the daycare setting can affect the family as a whole when they interact with the child and in order to build effective partnerships it is important that we develop a deep understanding of families and their diversity.



### 1.1.3 POVERTY:

The changing diversity in Canadian families also helps us to understand the growing need for child care services to help support families with young children and especially families in disadvantaged situations. The teen-age, single mother mentioned previously needs support systems as do other families. Unfortunately the need for affordable, accessible, high-quality child care services in Canada is not keeping up with the demand. The gap between the number of mothers in the paid labour force and the number of licensed child care spaces has been increasing for some time.

But what does disadvantaged mean? The Random House Dictionary of the English Language unabridged version defines it as:- "lacking the normal or usual advantages, as good homes, wholesome friends, etc." Within the context of this study it is defined in the sense of a family that is existing in unfavourable circumstances which may place them in an emotional, social or economic disadvantage. Single parent(s) of low-socio-economic status (SES), families undergoing emotional crises, such as, illness, death, separation or divorce or newly immigrated would all fit these circumstances (Mandell and Duffy, 1995).

Before continuing it is essential to examine what is meant by low (SES) or more simply put:- "WHAT IS POVERTY?"

As early as 1986, Katie Cooke in the report on the "Task force on child care in Canada" outlined the problems existing for families with young children. Child poverty in Canada today is not a myth as some people think. It is a fact. The research shows that 1.25 million children in Canada lived in low

income families in 1992. This figure represents nearly 1 in every 5 Canadian children (Friendly, 1994; Ryerse, 1994; Mandell and Duffy, 1995; Wilson, 1997). One in four children in Montreal does not "have enough to eat, sufficient clothing to keep warm or a decent place to sleep" (The Montreal Gazette, January 18, 1992, p. B4).

Poverty is complex and has many dimensions but the research describes two significant ways of looking at it. The first is that you are 'poor' if you cannot cover the cost of survival needs (generally considered to be: food, clothing and shelter). This is referred to as 'absolute poverty'. The second way is that you are 'poor' if after paying for your survival needs, you do not have enough money left over to enjoy a lifestyle viewed as 'normal' or 'average'. This is referred to as 'relative poverty'. In Canada this represents 38.5% of total income spent on basic needs. If a family spends more than 58.5 % of their total income on necessities, then they are considered poor. In fact 27% of poor families in Canada are considered 'working poor' and would fit into one of these categories (Shimoni and Baxter, 1996, pp. 164-165).

The problem of poverty had grown to such proportions in Canada that Bouchard (1992) announced in the federal House of Commons that the government had decided to put all its energies on the major problem of poverty of children rather than to spend money on a National Child Care policy as had been promised in the federal elections of 1984 and 1988.

A Child Development Initiative project, known as the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), was placed under the umbrella of the federal

government's Towards a Brighter Future program. This program was managed with the Quebec government through a protocol signed in 1993.

The objectives that were identified were that Quebec, through this program, would help parents in disadvantaged circumstances develop their parenting skills; help parents to adapt to their role and provide support for families to prevent adjustment problems.

To better understand the problem of poverty we need to examine the **myths of poverty**. The days of 'blaming the victim' (Ryan, 1971) should be over but the myths of poverty still seem to exist. Frequently people still believe that the poor are poor because they are lazy or because they don't try hard. They just need to try harder to succeed. When discussing family structures in early childhood training programs students have frequently expressed these views. Comments such as:-

"Parents don't care. They bring their children to the daycare hungry. They don't even feed them breakfast. They don't dress them properly." These comments or similar ones were replicated in Shimoni & Baxter (1996).

I will now examine the effects of poverty on families and more specifically on young children. It is a well documented fact that children in disadvantaged circumstances are at greater risk of experiencing multiple problems of social adaptations. These children are more likely to suffer from psychological problems, higher levels of anxiety, chronic health problems, such as, asthma, bronchitis, digestive disorders, low birth weight, etc. They are less likely to reach their physical and cognitive growth potential if they have had inadequate or poor nutrition. They often begin life at a disadvantage



because the mother had a poor diet during pregnancy. If you do not have enough to eat or if you need to rely on food banks a balanced diet becomes a problem. Babies born to impoverished mothers are at least doubly disadvantaged and at risk. Later intellectual functioning is affected by their biological vulnerability as well as by their poor social circumstances (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 219).

The high levels of stress that parents in these difficult circumstances face may even lead to neglect, lack of stimulation or even abuse. There is a higher incidence of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and poor health in poor families led by a mother. Of course this could be connected to the fact that women's wages tend to be lower. Often these families lack the social networks and experience feelings of social isolation. If you do not have sufficient income then it is highly unlikely that you will have money for babysitters or extra support to lessen the strain of parenting. This is supported by the works of Ryerse (1994), Tochon (1994), Mandell and Duffy (1995), Shimoni and Baxter (1996) and Wilson (1997).

## 1.2 THE PROBLEM:

But before the reader asks: "Why study partnerships between families in disadvantaged situations and educators in toddler daycare settings?" it is important to present the problem; make connections between my personal and professional experiences.

Partnership building (ongoing communication) between families, in disadvantaged situations and educators and its possible impact on the quality of care as perceived by families and educators is the problem. The

main objective of the research is to examine the sources of conflict and tension as perceived by families, in disadvantaged situations, and the educators in toddler daycare settings. Every researcher has biases. It is therefore important to explain the lens or the personal experiences that have formed my perceptions.

My perceptions of toddler care have been formed by my personal practical knowledge of the subject matter both as a parent and currently as a grandparent. My professional experiences have added to my interest in exploring the issue of quality care for toddlers.

Over the past twenty-five years my professional career has offered me the opportunity to work with children, with the families of those youngsters and with educators as a director of a parent-controlled child care centre and finally as an adult educator/co-ordinator of adult early childhood attestation programs at the college level.

Throughout this period I have interacted with parents from varied socio-economic levels of society. My exposure to these various groups increased my interest in partnerships between daycare and families of toddlers and the role that educators play in these settings.

This led me to read the research of Galinsky (1987, 1988, 1992), Weissbourd (1992), Powell (1989), Endsley, Minish, Zhou (1993), Shimoni and Baxter, (1992, 1996), Stevens *et al.* (1993), Wilson (1997) on parent-teacher communications and involvement. Their findings have strongly influenced my choice of topic and have helped me in looking at the problem of partnerships, sources of conflict and tension.

These authors have all conducted studies around family-school interactions and relationships and have all come to feel that there are certain conflicts and tensions involved in building partnerships. They promote the need for further research in a qualitative manner to gain deeper understanding of what, when and how conflicts occur in the process of building relationships. Powell (1989) has studied families, and parent education programs, and promotes empowerment of parents. He states that parents all have their talents and strengths for child rearing. Galinsky & Weissbourd (1992) have suggested a need to develop parent education programs that function on a "strengths" approach, that is, that parents are involved as equals in partnerships. Workman and Gage (1994) have discussed a "Family Strength Model" for developing family-school partnerships. This is a change from traditional programs in which parents have been considered to be receivers of knowledge and told what and how to "do it." Shimoni and Baxter (1996) and Wilson (1997) begin to talk about parent collaboration rather than parent involvement, as they too promote the idea of "empowerment of parents."

Whether toddlers should even be in daycare centres was another struggle that I was facing. More women are returning to the work force shortly after the birth of their children and the demand for toddler care increases. However in the 1960's, when I was a young mother and university student, western society was just beginning to accept the idea that women could have a career and children too. The research was focused on proving whether daycare was 'good' or 'bad' for children. Historically daycare had been perceived as a service for the poor or as an emergency intervention program and not a universal right. Quality infant/toddler group care was not



readily available. Traditionally a mother was expected to stay at home and nurture her young children. Bowlby's studies on "mother-child attachment" had reinforced the idea that very young children needed their mother full time or they could suffer emotional damage. However demographic changes in Canada show an increase in single-parent families. One in three children have a mother in the paid work force; one child in five lives in poverty. Child poverty is a fact in the 1990's (Mandell and Duffy, 1995; Wilson, 1997).

My feelings of inadequacy at times to help families in disadvantaged circumstances and subsequently hearing adult early childhood students express similar feelings or a lack of understanding of family situations led me to the research literature on poverty in Canada and its effects on children. These findings have been discussed in the definition of terms. Some of the questions that I struggled with were:-

- What are the special problems that disadvantaged families of toddlers in daycare experience?
- What can educators do in building partnerships? How do effective partnerships occur? When do they occur? What are the sources of conflict and tension?
- What are educators' biases if any and what is the impact on the quality of the care given?
- What are their expectations of these toddlers and their families?
- What are the perceptions of both the educators and the families?

My continuing interest in minority and low-income families led to my involvement as a teacher in a training program for First Nations and Inuit early childhood educators. This also led to participation in a focus group organized by the special Health and Welfare Canada project to establish Head Start programs for off-reserve First Nations and Inuit children across Canada.

The War on Poverty in the 1960's led the United States federal government to develop intervention programs for children between the ages of three to five years. These programs offered half day care. A major goal of the Head Start movement is to provide parents in disadvantaged situations, opportunities to develop their adult skills as decision-makers and to become advocates for children. The research demonstrated that children and their families' lifestyles could be positively affected by intervention. The Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan was a longitudinal study that focused on results of this intervention. Parents were actively involved in these programs (Galinsky and Weissbourd, 1992; Shimon and Baxter, 1996).

The question of whether toddlers should even be in daycare settings—especially toddlers in disadvantaged situations—has been debated frequently within the last few years. Researchers have differing view points. Belsky (1986) proposed that infants under one year attending group care more than twenty hours per week may be at risk emotionally. These findings were replicated by Fein & Fox (1990) in Zimilies (1993). Clarke-Stewart (1988) suggests that youngsters who have participated in quality centre care may be more self-confident than 'home-reared' children. Honig (1990)



discusses the importance of strengthening the family functioning and refers to the Syracuse Family Research Development Program and its outcomes.

According to Ryerse (1994), daycare experiences can act in a preventive way for toddlers and preschoolers in disadvantaged situations by offering developmental activities and learning opportunities that these children might otherwise not be exposed to. Howes and Hamilton (1993) suggest that the 'age-of-entry' into group care may increase the risk of developing insecure attachment to the mother. The stability of the care received can affect the child. The child who enters daycare at an early age may experience several caregivers in a lower quality centre.

The 'Act respecting child day care' (1979) states that every child has the right to quality day care services up to the end of the primary years (art.2, chap.1). The reality is often different however, as families in disadvantaged situations will often place their children in lower quality programs (Goelman and Pence, 1987; Moss and Pence, 1994; Howes and Olenick, 1986; Kontos and Fein, 1993). Galinsky, Howes, Kontos and Shinn (1994) reported in their study on family child care and relative care that children are more likely to be securely attached to their caregiver when the family day care home is rated as offering good quality care. However, they also found that children from low-income families are in homes offering lower quality care. They also found that quality appears to be higher if providers, whether relative or not, are trained in child development and want to care for children.

The quality of care seems to have a more important impact on predicting a child's development than the form of child care. The issue of quality care

plays an important role in all child care but especially when it involves infants and toddlers. Whether we agree or not on whether toddlers should be in daycare does not really matter because they are there. We need to find ways to ensure that the care they receive is of the highest quality. This led me to the decision to conduct this research study. The problem that is being studied is the partnerships between families and educators and their possible impact on the quality of care as perceived by parents and educators.

Researchers do agree that if toddlers are to be cared for in daycare centres, then they must receive high quality care. In the decade of the 1970's research tended to look at whether daycare was good or bad for young children. The answer was not yes or no but maybe. The results of this research led to the question and focus on quality of child care and its affect or influence on children's development.

Quality has been difficult to define. Many research studies such as, Bredecamp (1987), Canadian Child Care Federation (1990), Doherty (1995), Moss and Pence (1994), Phillips (1987), Powell (1989), Yeates *et al.* (1994) have identified levels of quality, indicators of quality that are both structural and process in nature. In this study I was interested mainly in one aspect of the process indicators, that of "interactions" between adults and the sources of conflict and tensions that may develop in the building of partnerships. As a qualitative researcher I wanted to observe for myself and to see whether specific themes might emerge in the process of building partnerships. I was not looking at 'interactions' through a quantitative lens. Walsh *et al* (1993) have discussed how an 'interpretive approach' can add to the research. Conducted in a natural setting, interpretive research puts



the emphasis on gaining deeper insight into the participants' perceptions of a situation; questions and themes emerge during the process rather than having been imposed prior to beginning the research. It requires the researchers to construct meaning in their everyday actions (p. 46). They argue the importance of interpretive inquiry in research as both the researcher and the researched are required to see themselves in new ways.

Bredekamp (1987) suggests that basic values and child rearing practices should be discussed between parents and educators especially when infants and toddlers are concerned. However in my teaching and in my supervisory capacities I frequently heard comments such as:- "They don't even care about their children". The frustration and anger that I have felt in their voices helped me to realize the need to better understand the problem of 'partnerships'. The parent may in fact feel inferior, not have the income to allow them to participate in events, come from a different culture, have feelings of guilt or not feel welcome, etc. These feelings were also expressed in the Parent/Teacher study (PTS) by Galinsky, Shinn, Phillips, Howes and Whitebook (1990) as outlined in Seefeldt (1990). The field of early childhood is changing. The role of the educator is expanding but training and support are not always adequate.

As more women with young children return to the work force, they require care for those children. As previously discussed, the roles of women and men in North American society are changing, and the structures and needs of the family are evolving concurrently. This process impacts upon the role that the educator is required to play in a child care setting. They are being faced with the need to respond to families and to offer support to families which are experiencing stress, ie, family crises, separation, divorce, death,

etc. Educators are also being expected to integrate children with special needs into the regular stream. The additional training which this entails, requires extra financial resources. Pence & Canning (1987) suggest that educators need to be trained to meet the needs of families; to understand the outside factors that affect these families, and thus, directly or indirectly, affect the child's development. They believe that traditional training techniques, that focus on the development of the child in isolation, are no longer sufficient.

We need to do further research to better understand how we can bridge the gaps in training models. Powell (1989) identifies the need to carry out field-based studies in parent-educator relationships on children and families and the connections to quality. He promotes the idea that training is needed on how to facilitate program-family relationships. Tochon's team is exploring a new model of intervention to help train educators working in poverty settings to respond to the special needs of parents in these situations and to strengthen the family-daycare partnership (Tochon, 1995). The Quebec government through the *L'Office des services de garde à l'enfance* has also recognized the problems of disadvantaged families and educators working with them. They have established funds to increase subventions to child care centres in poverty neighborhoods.

As previously stated we have focused mainly on teaching skills for working with young children, but in truth children are part of another system-the family, who are part of a childcare community within a larger community.

Before presenting the conceptual framework it is important to review the questions which I posed to help me to focus my research.

*How do parent-educator partnerships, or the lack thereof, in infant/toddler care affect the quality of care and the child's development as perceived by educators and parents in disadvantaged situations?*

This question developed indirectly from Honig (1985, p. 44) when she refers to the importance of the role of the parent and the caregiver in the infant/toddler's development and what each perceives the toddler's needs to be.

A review of the literature established that the critical question was not whether the infant or toddler should be in group care because no matter what we believe, infants and toddlers will increasingly be in group care due to social changes that are occurring today. It also confirmed that there is controversy concerning the research findings. Honig (1985) states that the choice of a caregiver for children under three years of age is a challenge, as each child has his/her own personality and temperament. It also takes time to develop a trusting relationship even with one special caregiver. As previously stated Belsky (1986) fears that infants less than one year of age are at risk if they spend more than twenty hours a week in day care. He feels that these infants may be more aggressive and have more behavioral problems during their preschool years. Other researchers such as, Clarke-Stewart (1988) and Fein and Fox (1988) suggest that on the contrary infants who have been in group care may show more self-confidence and be more sociable than infants who have been reared at home. Further Clarke-Stewart suggests that it may be too soon to know the results of infants in day care.



Perhaps part of the controversy stems from the fact that quantitative studies are carried out in 'artificial settings'. Zimilies (1993) points out that there is also a need to involve 'practitioners' and to carry out more qualitative research before coming to any definite conclusions. Walsh, Tobin & Graue (1993) call for more interpretive research involving practitioners and researchers. They promote the use of case studies as they are generally easier to read and to understand. The reader is able to "experience the world through the eyes of the author as well as the subject of the study." (p. 468).

The choice of a research question is as complex as is the issue of daycare. The next question that I asked myself was:-

*What seems important in building a partnership in caregiving?*

This question was considered important because it could help both parents and educators to express how they felt about partnerships; the role each participant plays in caregiving could be explored. Hidden agendas could become explicit. Assumptions, biases can interfere in the process of understanding and developing partnerships. This question also draws upon and supports an ecological perspective. The different levels of an ecological system affect how parents and educators interact. Both the family microsystem and that of the educators can have an impact on their interactions within the daycare setting. What about the parent's work or lack of employment and type of responsibilities? A review of the literature helped me to understand that respect for families as individuals and of their culture is essential if interactions are to be effective (Galinsky, 1988; Shimoni and Baxter, 1996; Powell, 1989; Stevens *et al*, 1993).

*Within an ecological framework, what elements promote or inhibit positive parent-educator relationships?*

Tensions and conflicts between families and educators are likely to affect communication, but what they are, and how and why they occur need to be understood in order to discover how relationships are promoted or inhibited. Pence and Canning (1987) point out that changing roles, family needs, family structures and societal changes all must be understood by educators in order to provide support for families. Educators need to be trained to respond to parents' perceived needs and not just to offer 'parent how-to exercises'. Social and public policy changes that may affect children in day care must also be taught (Friendly, 1994). This can best be understood by setting the problem in a conceptual framework.

### 1.3 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

In the following section I will examine in detail the conceptual framework for the study. My personal philosophy leans towards a constructivist approach to learning. Knowledge is conceived as a process whereby each of us looks at the world from a different perspective. I am interested in how people think and form ideas, and not just what they think. We need to help create reality through active participation, active inquiry and discovery. Each learner receives information and processes, acts upon and internalizes it, adjusting our current understanding and deriving meaning in the process. The knower is able to guide his/her learning within a learning environment that fosters interaction. The teacher is not just a teller and corrector, but someone who observes and asks open questions. Jones (1992) says that "teachers learn about teaching and learning by playing the teaching scripts, observing what happens, and discussing all of the possibilities with other teachers. In this process they come to see themselves as 'people who know' " (p. xiii). Belenky, Clinchy *et al* (1986), in their book Women's Ways of Knowing, explain that women often are 'received knowers' but that it is important that they move toward becoming aware of the mind's capacity for interpreting reality. They explain that women in many cultures have been treated as unequal and their voices silent for too long. This fits with Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, as each one of us acts upon and, in turn, is acted upon, through the various interlocking systems. We are constantly learning and creating meaning through our lived experiences. An ecological framework fits with the concept of daycare as a comprehensive service. A narrative of inquiry supported by the research of Connelly and Clandinin (1988), Tochon



(1994), Jones (1986,1992), Barell (1995), Knowles, Cole and Presswood (1994) provides a method within this framework.

Within an ecological framework one studies how organisms interact with their environment. This framework can help early childhood professionals understand their role in helping and supporting families. The Canadian Child Care Federation states that quality child care occurs "when there is a partnership between parents, service providers, training institutions provincial/territorial associations and governments, who together carry out supplementary responsibility related to the children's care" (CCCCF, 1990:17). As early as the 1970's the Royal Commission on the Status of Women proposed that the government and society has a responsibility for sharing in child rearing, in supporting families, in offering a variety of delivery models for supplementary child care. If quality care for toddlers is to occur, then we need the financial, professional and moral support of society in general. More specifically early childhood educators have a moral obligation to accept and to respect people for who they are whether they are rich or poor.

The ecological model of human development was introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970's. Bronfenbrenner states:

"The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing human properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded." (1979, p.21)

However Bronfenbrenner in the forward to Pence (1988) realizes that his original ecological model of human development while promoting the idea of interactions between organisms and environments, admits that more emphasis was put on environmental forces. More recent ecological researchers have worked to correct this. There has been a realization that the developing person is a complex structure and that the environment is also complex. Therefore a greater balance is required.

Pence (1988) suggests that an ecological perspective shows that an individual's health and well-being is connected to and affected by the environment in which he/she lives. A parent's behavior is influenced by their social relationships with relatives, friends, neighbours and colleagues (Stevens *et al*, 1993). No individual can operate in isolation. Bronfenbrenner likens the ecological environment to that of a set of Russian dolls. Each 'system' is nested in the next one, just as the dolls fit one inside the other (1979, p. 3). Therefore, when we consider a toddler in a daycare setting, we need to consider the whole social context in which this organism lives and interacts. We are accepting a child into child care but that child is not just in group care but is also part of a family. The family's characteristics affect the experience of being in child care and may have a greater influence on the child (Howes & Hamilton, 1993, p. 332; Harms & Clifford, 1993).

A closer look at Bronfenbrenner's ecological model reveals four interlocking structures: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. Each level interacts and impacts on other levels or is embedded as Bronfenbrenner mentions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).



The microsystem can be seen as a series of interactions stemming from the individual in his or her immediate environment. For example in the case of the child, he/she interacts with parent and family, peer groups, daycare, school or neighborhood. Adults in the family may interact with microsystems such as, work, church or place of worship, community groups. Their quality of life can be influenced by the primary systems that they interact with most directly. We need to remember that every person is different. Some single mothers may have many support systems while others may feel totally isolated.

The next level, the mesosystem, involves inter-relationships between two or more microsystems. Some examples would be:- the relationship between a family and the daycare, the family and the school, the workplace and the daycare centre and the school and the neighborhood. Each organism interacts with the others and have an impact on the development of the child. If a parent experiences any change within these interacting systems such as, her job hours being extended beyond the opening hours of the daycare centre, then the parent will need to find other solutions. This in turn affects the family's quality of life and affects the child's development.

In turn, the child, the family and the daycare centre are influenced by other external factors in society, in which they do not participate directly. These would include government agencies, social policies and laws, community services. Government decisions decide who will receive subsidies and social assistance. These form the exosystem. However, as previously stated, these systems are dynamic and affect each other. Individuals together can collectively influence policies. An example is the lobbying for changes to family policy in Canada. If families join together with child care



professionals and other social community groups they can advocate for change and eventually be heard.

Relationships are further affected by culture and value systems ( i.e., ideologies). Within our Canadian society there are different cultures which may not share the same ideologies. At times they may be in conflict. This macrosystem, like the other systems within an ecological model, is not static but changes in response to changes in the other systems. We have seen in the 'definition of terms' previously that the concept of family is changing. This in turn may affect the kind of policies that are developed in regards to child care for toddlers.

Another example is that if society believes that children are the sole responsibility of the parents, then there would be no need for government policy to aid families with young children (Yeates, Chandler & al., 1994:4-6).

In other words an ecological framework lends itself to looking at the interactions among toddlers, parents and early childhood educators and their relationship with the environments where they live and work. It is a holistic perspective and supports the idea of family-centered child care.

Galinsky & Weissbourd (1992) have proposed a 'strengths approach' rather than the more common 'deficit approach' to child care. In this system educators and parents learn from each other and the daycare is linked to other community services. Workman & Gage (1994) also promote a "Family Strengths Model" which focuses on involving families in the change process. Parents need to be equal partners and they (the authors) promote

the idea that child care needs to be comprehensive. Child care is part of an ecological framework.

An ecological framework using a narrative of inquiry fits with a qualitative research study using a phenomenological design as the emphasis is on the naturalistic, that is, research in natural settings and real experiences. Within the narrative of experiences it is the sharing and collaboration of individual stories that help individuals to derive meaning. This is supported by Walsh *et al.* (1993). If we are to provide high quality toddler group care, we need to work towards building bridges between the world of home, daycare and the greater community. At the level of the 'macrosystem', we need to get back to values and develop an 'inclusionary vision' (Moss and Pence, 1994). By researching family-educator interactions, parent involvement and family partnerships through narratives of experiences, we may be able to develop these links.

But it is essential to explain what is meant by 'narrative of inquiry'. In order to explain I refer to the writings of such innovators as, Connelly and Clandinin (1988); Carter (1993); Barell (1995); Jones (1986, 1993); Knowles, Cole and Presswood (1994). Eliot Eisner in the foreword to Henderson and Hawthorne (1995) refers to them as 'swimming upstream'.

The concept of narratives, the sharing of stories, is congruent with Deweyian philosophy. Dewey promoted a concept of education as being actively involved in constructing meaning and thus learning occurs. Maxine Greene in her forward to Henderson and Hawthorne (1995) talks about 'constructivist learning' and the part that story can play in constructing meaning. A narrative of inquiry lends itself to a 'bottom-up' rather than a

'top-down' system. They also refer to Carter (1993) who emphasizes that story is one basis for constructing knowledge, understanding and insight. Through story we gain meaning. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) also share Carter's beliefs that story can foster individual reflection and problem-solving. Schön (1983) proposes the idea that practitioners construct knowledge through reflecting on their actions. Clarke (1992, 1995) has tested Schön's ideas through the use of reflective analysis with student teachers.

Noori (1996) shows through her narrative of her own teaching experience how narrative can be an effective approach to deeper understanding of a problem.

Kleinfeld (1983) has also helped me to understand that one way adults learn is through sharing their own story and hearing other people's stories. My own experience in teaching adults has shown me that students derive meaning through the sharing of my experiences in daycare and with the interaction of their exchanging their experiences. Students often give me feedback that they understand a concept better when I share an anecdote or when we become co-learners. This information motivated me to use a narrative of inquiry method to study the problem.

Within a narrative of inquiry parents could be free to express frustrations, fears and viewpoints, and probe for possible alternatives to rear their child. Reflection on issues and concerns does not require any special resources or special language which might frighten or inhibit families. Educators could also describe their practice, clarify assumptions, values and reflect on their



belief systems. This collaborative process could all lead to deeper understanding.

In educational research throughout the United States and Canada, narratives of experiences have been used in teacher training at the secondary level. Tochon (1994) has used a new model of intervention. This model uses a narrative framework to help parents in their responsible parenting in daycare settings in disadvantaged settings. The idea of using such a method in daycare services is new and exciting. Through this new model of intervention educators may be helped in their development of partnerships between themselves and the families using the daycare service. The first phase of this research project has shown positive results.

## Chapter Two

### Review Of Literature

In this section the review of literature and the exploration of the problem's context is discussed. This section is organized according to themes that have evolved during my readings. These themes include both direct and indirect links to the problem and are relevant to my exploration and justification for the study.

#### 2.1 ECOLOGY OF THE FAMILY AS A CONTEXT FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT:

Justification for using an ecological framework is now explored in a chronological manner.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work has affected the way researchers think in the fields of social services, social policy and child development. Research has tended to focus on the actions of either child or adult but, according to Bronfenbrenner, needs to look more at the interactions within the unit. A review of several studies shows that the focal point has been on studying outcomes based on data that has primarily concentrated on separate events within the setting. He speculates whether the outcomes might have been different if studies had looked at the interconnections between settings, such as daycare and home. He mentions that so often the Strange Situation test is used to measure the child's response, but no connection is explored

between that response and the home setting. He refers to 'multisetting participation' as occurring when a developing person participates in more than one setting, e.g., a toddler who spends time at daycare and at home. The key to the mesosystem in his mind is the transition from home to a new setting. From his work we have come to realize that the family is simply one system intertwined with other systems. To describe the concept, he invokes the metaphor of a set of Russian dolls, each system being embedded in another, and having others inserted into it (1979, p. 3). His ecological model of human development and his four interlocking systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, were explained in the conceptual framework. Links were established with the infant/toddler daycare issue.

Bronfenbrenner (1986, p.723) further defines three different environmental systems that influence the family on an external level: the mesosystem model, the exosystem model and the chronosystem model. These external forces can affect how the family fosters the healthy development of their children.

*The family provides the principal context in which human development occurs but there are also other settings in which development takes place. These processes which affect development are interrelated*

This theme of societal changes has been viewed throughout the literature. However when an infant/toddler attends the daycare the parent remains the primary socializer (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Harms and Clifford (1993) use an ecological framework to assess early childhood educational settings. In their review of how daycare fits into



Bronfenbrenner's ecological model they show how the child can be affected and how each system is embedded in the other systems. Through the use of their diagrams I was able to fully understand how daycare partnerships could be explored through an ecological framework. They also point out in this chapter that 'close ties between families whose children are enrolled and the centres is a hallmark of high-quality programs (Harms and Clifford, 1993, p.481).

Moss and Pence (1994) outline a new paradigm for defining quality in early childhood programs. In this book of articles on quality they suggest that it is time to move toward an 'inclusionary' approach. They draw together the findings of the various studies explored in the other chapters in this final summary. They present the idea that stakeholders should participate in defining quality and that they can participate at different levels. In their promotion of an 'inclusionary' paradigm they make reference to the macrosystem of culture and value systems in society.

Shimoni and Baxter (1996) provide an overview of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and apply this model to working with families. In this book about "Working with families" they show how the family system interacts with the daycare and in turn is affected by external systems. The early childhood professionals also have external factors at work. The information contained in this book helped reinforce my understanding of how each system is embedded within the others.

## 2.2 CHILD POVERTY IN CANADA:

The second theme to be explored provides an indirect link to the problem. Although the problem is not directly dealing with poverty it is essential to have a full of understanding of the concept of poverty and its possible affects on young children and their families as the problem does explore the conflicts and tensions between parents in disadvantaged circumstances and educators in toddler daycare settings.

Ryerse (1994) reviews the literature and synthesizes studies and reports on the extent and depth of child poverty in Canada. Families in which the head of family is under 25 years old are more likely to live on low incomes than those whose head is older. The majority of low income families are working but poor. The consequences of growing up poor are also examined. It is pointed out that children living in poverty settings are at higher risk of developing health problems such as asthma, bronchitis and digestive disorders, and developmental delays. They are less likely to reach their physical and cognitive growth potential if they have not received adequate nutrition. Children in poverty often begin life at a disadvantage because during pregnancy the mother had a poor diet, which often leads to low birth-weight, consequently putting the newborn at increased risk for illness and, in some cases, death.

Environmental factors also play a key part in child development problems. Inadequate housing, a lack of money to purchase ample, properly fitting seasonal clothing, or the lack of quality child care arrangements, all add to the high levels of concern that parents in these difficult circumstances face.

The added stress may even lead to child neglect, abuse, and lack of stimulation.

There is a higher incidence of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and poor health in poor families led by a mother. This may be related to the fact that women's wages are often lower. Poor families often lack social support networks and experience feelings of isolation. Lacking sufficient income one is highly unlikely to be able to afford sitters or extra support to lessen the strain of parenting. Ryerse also points out that a large number of incarcerated youths come from poor families; there seem to be links with the problems associated with being poor.

Friendly (1994) also provides insight into the problems of poverty in Canada and offers statistical information on child poverty. She makes the link between child poverty and the need for child care policy as a government responsibility. Although Canada is an affluent nation, our child care situation ranks in the bottom third of industrial nations (Friendly, 1994 p.9). Child care is a public and political issue. In order for young children to become productive citizens, they need to receive quality care now. Family structures are evolving; children may be raised in any of a large variety of such arrangements. Frequently families do not have an extended family system available to them, because they have immigrated to Canada, leaving other family members behind.

In today's world, a majority of women with infants and toddlers are in the paid labour force. The prediction for the year 2000 is that more than two thirds of children under the age of six will need some form of child care, because their mothers will be employed. However there is no indication that



we will have a universally accessible child care system in place since, as Friendly explains the funding of programs relies heavily on parent fees. She also points out that federal funds for programs in health, welfare, unemployment insurance and housing have all been diminished. She believes that this has caused an increased insecurity in young Canadian families in the 1990's. Often single parent families are headed by a woman whose potential income is lower than her male counterpart; this could make the difference between whether a family is considered poor or not.

She discusses the Canadian child care system and argues that we do not have a system that meets the needs of families, children or society as a whole. Many families cannot find suitable arrangements as their situations are slightly out of the ordinary, such as having to work shifts or weekends. In addition, the cost is often beyond their financial means, especially when it includes infant/toddler care. Another problem is that Canada does not consider all children when establishing the percentage of need for child care spaces for young children. Rather, it is calculated based on the number of employed women with young children.

We tend to separate care and education. Child care is still primarily perceived as a service for working women. Public funding, the little that has been available, has generally been targeted at needy or modest income families through the Canada Assistance Plan, which does not even ensure high quality care for these children as parents must find a subsidized, regulated child care space. It is interesting that in Sweden and certain other western European nations, child care supply is based on the needs of all children. This different approach to child care is based on ideology. France and Denmark have doctrines that see child care as a valuable educational

service for all young children. This would be at the 'macro' level when viewed from an ecological perspective. Friendly's work helped me understand that our present system may present barriers to partnership building if educators feel that a subsidized family is carrying a stigma.

This work helps to understand the conceptual framework and how the different systems interrelate.

Mandell and Duffy (1995) offer insight into diversity, conflict and the changing structures of the family in Canada. In particular, the authors help to clarify the meaning of poverty, explaining that poverty can be understood in two main ways: 'absolute poverty', and 'relative poverty' (p. 236). When people have difficulty just surviving, ie, attaining the basic physical needs of food, clothing and shelter, their condition may be described as 'absolute poverty'. Poverty is problematic, however, as it depends on who is establishing societal norms and conditions, and is dependent upon economics and what level of income is considered as meeting basic needs.

'Relative poverty' refers to whether a person, after meeting basic needs, is able to live at or above a normal level of acceptable income, according to standards set by society. Furthermore, these acceptable levels of income vary according to the region in which we live and by what society considers as the 'good life' (p.336). Generally, middle class values are used to establish such norms. Poverty can be defined objectively or subjectively. Statistics Canada defines poverty by objectively setting an income level to cover basic needs for a specific size family. However, an individual can feel poor even if his/her income is above the basic level. For example, loss of

one income may mean a big adjustment in lifestyle, even though the remaining income is well above the 'poverty level'.

Mandell and Duffy also explore some popular myths concerning poverty. They discuss the concept of the poor as 'social failures', layabouts who are poor because they just refuse to work harder; that family poverty is not common in present Canadian culture and that the poverty that does exist in Canada today is a new phenomenon (p.235). They point to the Great Depression as a period when a very large portion of the Canadian population experienced poverty, and make the point that in fact the post-war period has been an exceptional time of plenty. Nonetheless, the division of wealth in Canada, as in most capitalist nations, has always been unequal and remains so. The economic recession of the past decade has increased the number of unemployed. Corporations continue to downsize and technological changes demand new skills in the marketplace. Many middle class families have been faced with a dramatic change in lifestyle as one or both parents have become unemployed. Some families have used all their savings and have been forced to turn to 'welfare'. Long-term unemployment has an effect on self-esteem and adds stress to family relationships. The myth that these people have brought poverty upon themselves is just that. The days of blaming the victim are fading as we realize that few jobs today are really secure.

The myth that the poor are lazy is also debunked by the authors. Often a lone parent, especially a single mother finds that she cannot afford to work at a minimum wage job. The cost of child care, food, clothing and shelter is higher than the cost of staying at home on welfare, so the cycle perpetuates itself. This does not mean that this person is lazy. When teaching students



in Early Childhood courses, I have found that they often believe that mothers are indolent if they are at home on social assistance. This work by Mandell and Duffy helped me to develop an understanding and to prepare for some of the possible biases that might be held by educators in daycare settings.

Mandell and Duffy also discuss who are the disadvantaged and examine the consequences of poverty on children and their families. The disadvantaged include women, children, the disabled and Native Canadians. Women often interrupt careers to start a family, sometimes these same women have children at an early age and therefore lack the higher education and training needed for higher income jobs. When families divorce, it is often the mother who becomes the sole support for the children. This frequently means a dramatic change in family income and a life of poverty. Very often women outlive their spouses and they may find themselves on a fixed income. There is a growing number of 'homeless women' in society. This reference drew me to see the parallel to the Great Depression and the plight of the homeless then. The authors state that Native Canadians are frequently living in poverty situations as the level of unemployment is relatively high. When I read this I could relate as I have observed children in native and Inuit communities in poverty situations. Poverty has definite affects on children. Lacking a proper nutritious diet, a child cannot fully develop its physical and intellectual potential. Frequently, the cheapest food has the lowest nutritional value, and consuming a diet high in low nutritional value can make you more susceptible to disease. A lack of education regarding a balanced diet can increase the health risk. Our harsh winter climate also has an affect. When we do not have sufficient money to provide warm,

properly fitting winter clothing for a child, he or she is more likely to fall ill. Being poor adds stress as one must worry about getting through the months; it may mean relying on food banks to tide one over.

The authors end with the suggestion that “we begin to examine how we can work collectively to improve the life chances of all Canadians” (Mandell & Duffy, 1995, p. 265). The information in this book helps to clarify the term ‘disadvantaged’ and to justify the study of toddlers in disadvantaged situations.

Shimoni and Baxter (1996) also explore the concept of poverty in Canada and how it affects parents and children. It was most helpful in clarifying definitions of families. They also offer an exercise on one’s values and perceptions of ‘family’ which helped me to reflect on my own understanding of ‘family’ and to identify my own prejudices. We need to be aware of our biases in order to deal with them and to then be able to begin to build partnerships with others who may be different.

Wilson (1997) deals with poverty in Canada and gives an overview of the statistics on poverty. Chapter one provides memories of individuals who are poor and clearly shows the frustrations and problems that are faced by the poor. She also shockingly puts across the fact that as a 1<sup>st</sup> world nation, we are certainly acting as a 3<sup>rd</sup> world nation in regards to the level of children living in poverty, which is five times the rate in Sweden, four times that in Norway, and twice that of Israel. All of these countries have taken steps to provide for families with young children (Wilson, 1997, p.2).

Her explicit example of the costs involved in a life of poverty shows clearly that there is no money left for entertainment, recreation, reading materials, insurance, etc.

The changing roles of mothers, fathers and grandparents and the diversity in Canadian families are outlined. This information was helpful in my attempt to establish parent-educator sessions, as I point out in chapter 5, the story of the researcher.

The literature in this section has helped in understanding the context of family and in understanding how other systems interact with it.

## 2.3 EVALUATION OF INFANT/TODDLER DAY

### CARE:

A qualitative action research study focusing on 'parent-educator relationships' is supported by Zimilies (1993) and Howes (1989). The issue of "good" and "bad" research in infant care has been explored by Zimilies (1993) and Walsh & King (1993). Zimilies begins his inquiry into "hard data" research in the evaluation of infant day care with the acceptance that a major social change is occurring in today's world. That is, more parents are delegating the care of their young children to substitute caregivers as compared to twenty or thirty years ago when maternal care was the acceptable norm. He has referred to a special issue of Early Childhood Research Quarterly (1988) evaluating the impact of infant daycare. He has chosen it to illustrate how such an important social change can "be submerged and obfuscated by the preoccupation with data". (p. 371)



"Hard data" collection focuses on systematic empirical study, that is, operationally defined variables, measurable outcomes, etc. This fetish, as he terms it, puts little or no emphasis on the clinician/practitioner's point of view. Walsh and King (1993) agree that "data fetishism" does sometimes occur but that it should never happen. They argue the point that one type of research is not better than the other, but rather that certain fundamental rules must be followed in both quantitative and qualitative research. High standards are required for qualitative research as well. According to Zimilies (1993 p.371), no other way of thinking seems to matter to the hard data researcher:

*subjectivity or intuitively derived knowledge tends to be brushed aside, even if it has received a substantial degree of validation, and is based on an intensity and duration of observation that surpasses what is usually achieved by adhering to conventional methods of research.*

Zimilies uses Belsky's study about the effects of nonmaternal care received during infancy as an example of "hard data" research. Belsky concentrated on Ainsworth's Strange Situation Test, (1973) to prove that infants who experience larger amounts of nonmaternal care show less secure forms of attachment. The criticism is that this was all done in an artificial setting, short observation sessions, and in controlled situations. He said that infants, spending more than twenty hours per week in daycare, were more likely to show insecure patterns of attachment. He carried these findings over to studies of the social behaviour of preschool children. Clarke-Stewart (1988) and Fein and Fox (1988) disagreed with these findings. Zimilies makes a case for involving the clinician/practitioner in studying the problem.

In reviewing the literature, I have found that most articles have dealt with 'hard data' research. The practitioners are the people who most probably have logged the hundreds of hours of observations under many different circumstances but 'hard data' research relies on the researcher's observations.

Walsh and King (1993) point out that practitioners have practical knowledge, insight and opinions which form one important source of information. However even qualitative researchers should use some inference and gather knowledge in a systematic and rigorous manner (p.400). Research should be done in a qualitative case manner before undertaking such quantitative inquiries.

Walsh, Tobin and Graue (1993) explain how interpretive research can be an effective approach in the field of early childhood. They emphasize that meaning is understood through dialogue and negotiation between researcher and the researched. Through constructing meaning of their everyday actions they are both compelled to see themselves in new ways. One of the key points that they make is that interpretive researchers focus on actions rather than behaviours. Inquiry takes time and patience. However, we must also be careful not to develop a new "élite in control of knowledge"; we need to be aware of the imbalance of power that may be present between researcher and those being researched. The interpretive researcher uses data collection and analysis techniques such as listening, conversing, interpreting, reflecting, describing and narrating (p. 465).

This supported my interest in doing a study of one year wherein I would engage in naturalistic observation, participate in toddler settings and use

guided discussions with 'stimulated recall', field memos, narratives of experiences to gain a better understanding of parent-educator partnerships and the possible sources of conflict and tensions.

## 2.4 INFANTS/TODDLERS IN CHILD CARE:

In order to better understand family-educator partnerships and how they affect quality of care as perceived by families and educators, it would be helpful now to look at the research concerning mental health of babies as this can give insight into how young children think.

Major theorists, such as, Erikson, Mahler, Bowlby and Ainsworth, to name a few, help us to understand the emotional development of infants and toddlers.

Honig (1993) recaps Erikson's trust/mistrust, autonomy/shame stages which are familiar to infant/toddler caregivers. Sometimes children attending daycare react in "power struggles" due to influence of misunderstood struggles for independence at home. Toileting and eating are two examples that might lead to difficulties at child care as frustrations and inconsistencies arise between the daycare and the home. This is an example of conflict and tension that may affect the partnerships between educators and families.

The author also reminds us that Margaret Mahler studied stages of maternal care. She found that infants initially have a need for a close "body relationship". They gradually become aware of the outside world and move towards a "practicing" subphase, during which they rely on the primary caregiver to be there when needed; they explore but return to the caregiver.



Their new cognitive abilities help them to think about and to struggle with separation and their growing autonomy needs an understanding caregiver so that the toddler can develop what Mahler calls 'constancy'- the ability to sustain lengthy separation from parents who are both resented and loved.

Attachment theory has been promoted both by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Ainsworth's 'Strange Situation Test' has already been discussed in Belsky (1986, 1988). The babies' secure attachment to the caregiver is at the root of later development of self-worth and the ability to interact socially. Babies need at least one secure attachment figure in the family to allow them to handle the stress of daily separation (Honig, 1993).

Honig (1990) in her chapter "Infant/toddler education issues: practices, problems and promises" in Seefeldt (1990) suggests that some infants with difficult temperaments and from low socioeconomic status families, who have less adult support, especially from the spouse or other social support systems, may require home visits and greater support from well trained caregivers. She bases these findings on the work of Thomas and Chess (1977) and Crockenberg (1981). The author also discusses the Syracuse Family Development Research Program (FDRP), a long term project in which she participated with Lally *et al.* at Syracuse University. It's main goal was to strengthen family functioning. This model provided high-quality infant education, health and nutrition, parent group meetings, individual home visits and family support efforts. The participants were teenage mothers and overwhelmingly they were single parents. Infant caregivers were trained to work with the experimental groups. One of the most fascinating outcomes of this study was that youngsters felt more positive about themselves and were more likely to succeed and to continue in school. Parents also

reported feeling proud of their children and were more likely to encourage them to reach their potential. The FDRP is frequently referred to in current research on infant/toddler care with disadvantaged toddlers. This article supports my research and gives me greater insight into some of the possible situations disadvantaged families may face and some of the possible conflicts and tensions that may result between families and educators in toddler settings.

Howes and Hamilton (1993) are interested primarily in the social and emotional development of the young child. They point out that 'child care' is care of children by someone other than the mother and they mention that society seems to have mixed feelings about working mothers. Some people believe that if a mother works, she is neglecting her children and that this may contribute to anti-social behaviours. Their chapter includes three basic forms of child care: centre care, family home daycare and in-home care, reviewing some of the major research findings on caregiver stability. Toddlers between 18 and 24 months who experience a change in caregivers were less likely to have stable caregiver attachment than those who experience changes later. This seems to be a vulnerable age. These findings seem to be reinforced when they look at 'age of entry' and its affect on the stability of care received. Their findings indicate that the infant in child care is more likely to experience more than one caregiver and/or caregiving arrangements which means less stability in care. The authors refer to the National Child Care Study of Whitebook *et al.* (1990) which reported that staff turnover rates were over 40%.

In the second part of the chapter, the focus is on relationships of children with others in child care and take a look at what combinations best predicts

the potential development of young children. Family characteristics are explored. They report that studies show that children who could benefit from high quality and stable child care, due to unstable family home situations are often placed in low-quality programs. They also point out that there are likely to be links between the levels of stress, disorganization and socioeconomic status. A discussion on the influence of child care on families promotes the idea that high quality child care may provide families with support networks among educators as well as with other families. Support services, such as, health and nutrition and education may be available and helpful.

The overview of the research findings on Head Start programs shows that intervention programs for disadvantaged families continue to have positive affects on children's cognitive ability throughout the first three to four years of elementary school. The authors' conclusion that best predictions of child development come from a combination of family and child care influence supports and justifies my interest in gaining a better understanding of partnerships.

The theories reviewed in this section have shown an influence on the behaviours of the children in the daycare environment and can indirectly affect the educator-toddler interactions as well as the parent-toddler interactions.



## 2.5 MATERNAL ATTACHMENT, MATERNAL ATTITUDES AND MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT:

A critical evaluation of the research literature on maternal attachment, maternal attitudes and maternal employment as a theme was pursued as I thought it might shed a little light on my understanding of the parent's perspective when putting their child in the care of another person or persons. Conflicts that may develop when families share the care of their children with others may also be better understood.

Maternal attachment studies have tended to use traditional families, that is, one parent working, mother stays at home, child does not attend child care. However, Stith and Davis (1984) examined maternal employment. These authors focused on the quality of caregiving practices of working mothers in own-home settings and substitute caregivers in unregulated family daycare homes. Their findings showed no difference in the quality of care received by infants in own-home settings but less stimulation and responsive care and environments in the family daycare homes. This information could be useful in understanding strategies that could be used to improve training programs for early childhood students.

Bronfenbrenner, Alvarez and Henderson (1984) showed that the effects of maternal employment were different for sons and daughters. Evidently the parent's work situation influenced the parent's perceptions of their three year olds.

Benn (1986) did a study that included thirty 18 month old children whose mothers were well-educated and worked full-time. She used the Strange Situation test and found that boys who had been left earlier in care more frequently showed a secure attachment. She also found that more highly integrated mothers used a sitter rather than a family-daycare arrangement. This led to an understanding that maternal characteristics have an impact on the infants ability to make the adjustment to other-than-mother care. Her findings showed that some male infants are more vulnerable than others. She also suggested that family support systems are important.

Clarke-Stewart (1988) shows that mothers who work full-time increase the risk that their infant will have a less secure maternal attachment and higher likelihood of later development problems than infants of part-time mothers or stay-at-home mothers.

However Waters and Deane (1985) in Howes (1989) used a "Q-sort" description (a system of rating behaviours) in a natural setting. They found no difference in security attachment of infants of working and non-working mothers.

Howes and Hamilton (1992) conducted two studies. Study one used attachment Q Set to assess attachment to mothers during child care arrivals and pick up times. Their findings indicated that infants in child care had fairly stable and positive maternal attachment relationships. Families who have trouble in developing secure attachments also have trouble in choosing appropriate child care for their child (Howes and Stewart, 1987, in Howes and Hamilton, 1992).

A more recent study conducted by the National Institute of Health and noticed in The Montreal Gazette (April 21, 1996:A 1-4) asked the question "Does a mother put her child at risk by working outside the home?" The overview of the study reported findings that the toddler's sense of trust of mother wasn't affected by attending daycare, the number of hours, the age entering daycare, the quality of care, the stability of care arrangement but rather by the sensitivity and responsiveness of the mother to the child. This seems to replicate Benn's (1986, p. 1230) finding:

*When the mother-son relationship is characterized by warmth, acceptance and freedom of emotional expression—a pattern characteristic of highly integrated mothering—it appears that the male infant can remain reassured of maternal availability even in her absence.*

At the same time however the results seemed to show that boys were more at risk for more time in daycare. If they spend more than thirty hours per week, there is a greater risk of insecure relationship with mother. The study also reconfirmed factors of high quality programs.

Werner's (1989) study showed that a loving caregiver who offers security is important during the first year of life. The study ran over a thirty-two year period and involved 698 multiracial Kauai at-risk infants. It looked at the significance of high quality non-parental child care. The outcome of this study showed that infants with working mothers and inadequate substitute care in the first twenty months were more likely to develop coping problems and delinquencies when reaching adulthood.



Honig (1992) reminds us that infant/toddler caregivers must provide nurturing, responsive care. This often means that the roles of caregiver and parent overlap. The boundaries are less well defined, especially in regards to infants at developmental risk, which may prove to be a source of tension when building the family-educator partnerships. She presents the argument that quality infant care and education can provide a positive emotional climate for children without disturbing the infant-mother attachment. At the same time, however, she indicates that there is an 'if' which is linked to staff training ratios and family support. She refers to various studies such as Jay Belsky's (1988) finding that an infant is able to maintain a maternal attachment if it is not in group care more than twenty hours per week. She goes on to say that consistency—continuity and quality of care—are extremely important. However, parents experiencing high stress levels tend to place their children in poorer quality centres. She concurs with the results of studies that show males to be more vulnerable if mothers return to full-time work

The studies just reviewed all show how complex the problem really is. Neither the toddler nor the family can be viewed in isolation. External forces are always at work. The organism is always open to change from external systems. In other words, the parents' social networks, i.e., friends and acquaintances, parents world of work and other external settings all play a part in the toddler's development (Pence and Goelman, 1988).

Bronfenbrenner (1986, p.735) states that:

*there is an absence of studies of how children's development is affected indirectly through the role of the daycare as a support system for parents,*

*especially for mother . and the failure to investigate the interrelation between daycare and parental employment . daycare as a support system*

In this same article he cites researchers such as Tulkin and Kagan (1972) who reported that middle class mothers used more verbal interactions and provided more variety of stimulation to their infants. There were further studies done around maternal-mother attitudes. This 'process-context' model, as Bronfenbrenner terms it, shows influences within the family but these forces can also affect how the infant develops within the daycare setting. Crockenberg, (1981, in Bronfenbrenner, 1986) took this process a little further to a 'person-process-context' model. She found that the amount of social support that a mother received when the infant was three months old had an affect on the infant-mother attachment at age one year. However she also saw that the infant's temperament could play a role. This study helps justify an ecological framework for my study.

Tochon (1994) in the first phase of an intervention model has met with positive results in the adaptation of children in disadvantaged settings in the transition between family and daycare settings. Galinsky and Weissbourd (1992) have taken up Bronfenbrenner's challenge in the promotion of the concept of family centreed child care. In their chapter in Spodek and Saracho (1992) they point out that traditional systems of child care have focused on the child as the client when in fact the system is the family within a larger system. Parent programs have offered remediation but more current research is beginning to recognize the importance of prevention and that parent involvement means that parents should be an integral part of the child care setting. They are promoting a holistic approach to the family. Throughout the chapter there is reference to two main themes- family

centreed care and family support movements. In the Syracuse Family Development Research Program , Ron Lally states that:

*"It seems clear that our original notion to involve parents as intervention agents paid off" (Lally, Mangione and Honig, 1987, p.28 in Spodek and Saracho, 1992).*

Over the years of my professional experience I have grown to believe in a system that is complex, holistic and works with all parties to prevent difficulties. Their work influences my decision to focus on partnerships and the sources of conflict and tensions. These articles help me in pursuing a qualitative paradigm using a narrative of inquiry. Through sharing narratives of feelings, frustrations, values, child rearing practices a clearer vision of the possible sources of conflicts and tensions in partnerships may emerge.

## 2.6 PARENT-EDUCATOR RELATIONSHIPS AND TRAINING OF EDUCATORS:

The main theme of this literature review will now be explored through reviewing the works of Anglin and Glossop, Cloutier, Galinsky and Weissbourd, Shimoni and Baxter, Wilson, Powell, Stevens *et al*, Pence & Canning, Doherty, Endsley, Minish and Zhou, etc.

Ellenburg and Lanier (1984) also discuss the importance of educators understanding parents. Interacting effectively with families requires respect for the parent as a person and for their culture; requires flexibility & sensitivity and the ability to create an atmosphere of partnership. This article was written in regards to children at the school level but the basic



principles put forth are equally important to the relationships of parents and educators at the toddler level.

Cloutier (1985) in his article about parents in day care, makes links to the ecological model, stating that a child's development is affected positively through parent's involvement. He points out that discontinuity for the child is not good and parent-educator interactions can lessen this by building up partnerships. The parent is the primary caregiver and therefore plays an important role in the education of the child. Another advantage of parent involvement in daycare is that it prepares or sets the stage for involvement in the child's education in the school system. This article helps us to understand how the different 'microsystems' of Bronfenbrenner overlap and in turn act upon other larger systems. He suggests that parent involvement helps to provide a harmony to the child's life, or in other words, offers a balance for the child between home and daycare ways of doing things. Bronfenbrenner has made reference to the fact that the child is part of a system—the family—and that when the family's self-esteem is raised as they become more effective in their parenting skills, there is a ripple effect in other parts of their lives.

The idea of training for caregivers on the subject of partnerships has also been explored by Honig (1985). She maintains that the issue of communication is extremely important in regards to parent-educator relations. Support services should be in place to allow for individual parent-educator interactions to occur. The supervisor plays a role in this issue and therefore helped me in my decision to observe these interactions. On page

44, Honig leads the reader to ask how we can realize the importance of the roles of both the parent and the caregiver in the infant's development, when she talks of the need to find ways to find a balance, in dealing with differences between what parents perceive their children's needs to be, and what the caregivers perceptions might be. She suggests the possibility of a rift between the parent and the caregiver and reminds us that self-esteem must be maintained. The importance of avoiding developing an "us-them" schism is also discussed. (p. 44) One of the positive outcomes of the Syracuse Family Development Research Program conducted by Lally as previously mentioned was the empowerment of parents and the building of self-esteem.

She also points out that staff turnover can have a negative impact on toddlers, especially if they are abused and have been placed in group care by social services. She states that it is of vital importance that educators have training in child development and in communication skills, as it is important to act as a support system. The daycare may be the only stable environment for a child. She promotes the idea of extra community support at certain times of the day, such as lunch and naptime, an idea which agrees with an ecological concept as promoted by Bronfenbrenner's work. Her support of training in communication in order to ensure that interactions between parents and educators are balanced and that self-esteem is not damaged on either side.

Anglin and Glossop (1987) draw our attention to the fact that the monolithic view of the family is no longer the average. Furthermore there are many different ways to parent. They also point out that educators need to be open

to learning from families themselves and to understand that daycare may be the only support system available to families in difficult situations. Studies have been done on family support systems and the results show that the support families receive through help-seeking and help-giving can affect how families handle stress. In a disadvantaged family situation this partnership building between family-daycare may be critical to the child's later social adaptation and coping. The daycare setting may be the primary social support system or act as an 'extended family'.

Galinsky (1988) has also spent considerable time researching parent-teacher sources of tensions, sources of support. She conducted a survey which included five child-care programs. 62 percent of the staff reported that they felt that they worked hard, but that parents did not appreciate that they did so, indicating that educators do not feel valued by parents. The author describes her research at Bank Street regarding the affects of work on outside life. Results show that parents who work more hours are likely to have more problems; mothers with children younger than 18 who work long hours have higher levels of stress related health problems. When parents cannot control their work hours, they are more likely to have difficulty in balancing job and family responsibilities. Demanding jobs lead to more family stress. She has also looked at job stress and spoken about the research of Kontos (1984).

Galinsky has identified the following as possible causes of tension and conflict:

- Caregivers may not really value a parents abilities as a parent.



- Educators may assume that parents don't care about their children, without finding out about a child's family, home setting and support systems.
- Parents might be affected by the tensions of their jobs and not leave those stresses at the workplace. Their moods are affected and educators generally see them at the beginning of the day when they are rushed, or at the end of the day when they may be very tired.
- Educators often have families and they also frequently work long hours. A parent arriving late at daycare may cause a problem for an educator with family responsibilities.
- Frequently, educators try to offer support to parents, but they cannot "be all things to all people." They sometimes end up burning out.

She also discusses the role of the supervisor / administrator in building effective partnerships and suggests some possible causes of tension and conflict such as the lack of psychological support from the supervisor, not providing an adequate physical environment for educators, and not communicating effectively so that policies, procedures and expectations are clear to all parties. These factors may be relevant to my research and add insight to the problems that families and educators face in toddler settings.

Pence (1988) says that an effective partnership between family and educator not only helps the child, but also "...strengthens the fabric of the family" (p. 11). People hold strong views about child care even though they may not realize it until they are challenged by someone else's views.

Gonzales-Mena (1992) feels that the more people—parents and caregivers—work hard together to deal with ‘culturally assaultive experiences’ the less likely children will be affected (p. 4). This does not mean that an educator from a different culture will be in conflict with a parent or that the care will be inconsistent. Rather reference is made to the importance of establishing consistency between the home and the daycare so that the child can become a “solid member of his culture” (p. 9).

The Canadian Child Day Care Federation’s 1991 ‘National statement on quality care’ also promotes the importance of partnerships between parents and educators through parent involvement. Friendly (1994) also promotes the importance of parent involvement and partnerships. She confirms that it is both empowering and a learning experience for parents.

Balahan (1992) also supports the notion that our childhood, our neighbourhood, our parents and our values as adults all influence us as we interact on a daily basis with children and their families. Honig (1985), as mentioned above, supports the idea that educators in training to work with infants and toddlers should be required to study communication techniques in order to foster the idea of sharing power. Each person’s needs can be met without loss of self-esteem or infringing on other’s rights. In another study Honig (1993) cites Liberman (1989, p.197) “that the infant caregiver must be culturally sensitive towards different cultural perceptions and maintain an openness towards the values and preconceptions of others”. This fits with an ecological perspective.

Smith and Hubbard (1988) in Doherty (1995) looked at relationships between child behavior and communication between parents and teachers.

They studied the amount, the extent of two-way discussion, the extent to which feelings were positive or negative and whether the relationship was equal. This study was conducted in community kindergartens in New Zealand, but there is much that would also relate to interactions in an infant/toddler setting. Doherty (1995) further reviews the study of Hogan (1991) that seems to reinforce the notion that positive communication between parents and educators has a positive outcome on children's interactions with each other. This is another reason for studying family-educator partnerships.

Pence and Canning (1987) in discussing training of daycare educators outline the importance of changing traditional training techniques which focus on educating people to meet the needs of children without referring to the outside factors that affect a child's development. They point out that societal changes, family structures, family needs and changing roles must all be understood by the daycare educator in order to provide support for families. Educators need to be trained to respond to families' perceived needs and not just to be able to offer professional 'parent how-to exercises'. In addition, educators must be aware of social and public policy changes that affect children in daycare.

The research on parent involvement is explored through the next articles and links are shown to the problem being researched, that is, parent-educator partnerships.

Powell (1989) talks about the increase of mothers of young children in the work force and thus the need for non-relative child care. He says it is important for research to look at the impact of day care-parent partnerships



on quality of care. Parent involvement can have a positive impact according to the studies outlined by Powell.

Powell then discusses that partnerships are generally referred to as relations between parents and educators. Traditionally it also includes parent participation, parent involvement, and parent-teacher collaboration. There doesn't seem to be a consensus about the meaning of partnership in the daily operational sense. Therefore it may need to be defined more clearly. Another key point made in this book is that parents possess strengths, talents for childrearing. We need to respect parents and develop mutuality. This was also promoted by Galinsky & Weissbourd (1992) with their 'strengths' approach to parent involvement.

In chapter 2 we read that discontinuity between daycare and families is greater in low-income and ethnic minorities. He supports the need to do research to understand partnership building and its possible effects on the child. The research literature shows gains in child's cognitive development is sustained longer if parent education and parent involvement exists in the child care program.

Powell goes on to say that in infant/toddler groups the role of the educator often overlaps with the role of the parent due to the fact that younger children require people in their lives who must assume responsibility for routine caregiving. He says this often leads to unclear boundaries and a feeling of encroachment on each others territory. This is also replicated in Honig (1990), as mentioned previously. This is a source of conflict and tension which may be a factor in this study. He talks about observational data gathering at informal and social communication times—transition times.

He found a greater number of social communications occurring than formal, factual information sharing. He also refers to the Victoria family home day care project which showed closer parent-educator relations occurred in the family home day care situations. This may be partly due to the fact that there are fewer families involved.

A most helpful item was his information that shows how conflict and tension can result in informal conversations between parents and educators. He suggests that educator training programs need to promote training in understanding the role of informal parent-educator communication. His example made me stop and think. Often misconceptions lead to conflict or tensions. This book was extremely helpful in clarifying the route that I wished to take in my research study.

Endsley, Minish and Zhou (1993) pick up this theme in their study on parent involvement and quality day care in proprietary centres. Their study included sixteen privately owned centres, chosen because working parents in the U.S. have greater access to such facilities. They also point out that proprietary centres have not been studied as frequently in regards to parent involvement.

Both infant/toddler and preschool programs were included in the scope of the study, which considered directors, parents, caregivers, as well as the centre itself as subjects. A majority of the families were middle class, while the balance were working class. Instruments for the study included a director interview, a staff questionnaire and two observation instruments. One aspect of the director interviews was a list of more formal parent involvement activities that occurred at each centre. Results showed that

centres with directors who promoted formal parent involvement were also more likely to foster daily informal communication between families. These centres had preschool staff who involved parents in higher quality informal conversations with parents at transition times. Staff-parent exchange in infant-toddler classes were not as affected, but the authors suggest that this may be due to the necessity for staff-parents' daily sharing of information and consequently differences among directors' commitment to parent involvement may not play as significant a role.

They support the idea of links between parents and other socializing agents of children, i.e., day care centres, talking about shared partnerships and continuity of care. The authors confirm the importance of parent-daycare interactions in formal and informal ways, suggesting that if we want high quality programs then it is essential to involve parents and in order to do this we need to establish various strategies to involve parents through formal and informal communications. They looked at informal communications through 'transition times', drop-off and pick-up times. The majority of parent-educator communications occur within these times and last approximately twelve seconds. They also found that parents seem to have more time to talk in the afternoon while educators were freer to talk in the morning. This puts them at odds.

This part of the article proved extremely helpful in planning my field observation procedures. It helped me consider some of the possible themes that might emerge during the process of my field observations at transition times. The two main purposes for this study were: a) to look at relationships and different ways of linking families to the day care and b) to see how these links are related to the quality of the care the child receives. Within



the study they reviewed some possible ways to link parents to child care settings. They suggested parent meetings, parent-staff conferences, newsletters, handbooks, bulletin boards, volunteering, field trips and sharing information.

The authors state that further research needs to be done on informal parent-educator communications in day care centres. They referred to some descriptive studies that show most informal parent-staff conversations occur once or twice weekly, are very brief and share important information less than half of the time. However, there seemed to be some differences between centres as some centres do seem to make a commitment to effective transition time communication. This was then backed up by the findings of a study which indicated that informal communications had positive outcomes on children's social interactions with parents and other children.

Stevens *et al.* (1993) review the concept of families (parents) and how they fit into an ecological perspective of care and education. They point out that parent-child interactions are an important factor in a child's development. In addition through a review of some of the more recent studies on parent support networks and parent involvement, they demonstrate how personal social networks have an influence on behaviours and perceptions of parents. Conflicts in family-school partnerships were also reviewed. Reference was made to Head Start and other intervention programs that have recognized the critical role that families play in a child's development.

Workman and Gage (1994) present a "Family Strengths Model" as a new approach for working with families. This model focuses on individual growth;

assessing individual strengths and needs; honoring families' choices about the type of changes they wish to make. It is a bottom-up concept that starts with the child and promotes the ideas of working with family members and the development of family support systems. Families are treated as equal partners and are encouraged to be involved at a variety of levels. They go so far as to suggest that the ways to view both parental involvement and training for early childhood professionals need to be reviewed.

Conflict and tension between teachers and parents were also explored by Knowles, Cole and Presswood (1994). Research results showed that teachers expressed the opinion that low-income parents were not interested in child's education. This reflected some of Galinsky's findings as previously mentioned. Although these authors deal with elementary schools their examples of preservice teachers interacting with parents helped me to understand that the use of narratives could reveal perceptions of parents and educators and this might lead to themes emerging. Chapter 9 of this work showed links to an ecological model. Pertinent questions that might be useful in parent-educator sessions were also discovered in the research activities section.

Shimoni and Baxter (1996) confirm the importance of parent-educator partnerships on the child's development. However they suggest that some of the frustrations expressed by early childhood professionals in talking about parent-educator partnerships may be the result of different expectations about the meaning of the terms of partnerships, parent collaboration, empowerment of parents and parent involvement. The authors review past and current research on these concepts. They cite Galinsky (1990) who identified sources of tension in a study that characterized parents as over

indulging their children and rushing them. Another study by Boutte *et al.* (1992) described parents as uncooperative and negative in the eyes of educators. Kontos and Wells (1986) found that parents were perceived in different ways depending upon socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Single and minority or lower economic income families were held in low regard. Communication at 'end-of-day' and 'drop-off time' were shown to be times that some parents avoided. Shimoni and Baxter then list the following possible sources of tension and conflict when building partnerships:

- Educators and parents may have preconceived ideas. Parents, from lack of understanding, believe that caregivers have an easy job. Educators may believe that the children are not a priority in the lives of their parents.
- Differences in cultural values and beliefs.
- Some parents have difficulty in seeing educators as professionals. This may be partly due to the overlap in some areas of care-giving.
- Differences in goals and approach to learning.
- Differences in perspective. A parent generally focuses on the individual child, while the educator must think of the group and must balance individual requirements with the needs of the group as a whole.
- Policies that are not clearly understood.

This list provided me with some possible themes to explore in my study (Shimoni and Baxter, 1996, p. 261).



It is essential to build effective partnerships, but in order to do this parents and educators must value and respect each other. Rockwell, Andre & Hawley (1996) show that some parents have strong parenting skills, while others need help in developing self-image, self-control, and interpersonal skills. Such parents may be labeled "difficult to reach" or "non-caring" by educators and these biases may lead to alienation of the families involved. Most parents are "reachable" and "caring". Working with families who are facing problems remains a challenge for educators, but it is important to develop strategies which foster skills in communicating. In other words, a climate of mutual respect is essential for effective partnerships to occur. Wilson (1997) suggests that parent input increases the child's feelings of trust, security and attachment. Teachers benefit when parents participate in some format as teachers then feel more respected or valued. In turn this creates a stable environment for the child in the day care centre. From an ecological perspective when parents and teachers form effective partnerships, then the child receives a positive model of the importance of community.

The toddler's home influence affects his/her development in the daycare, while on the other hand, events at the daycare can also affect development. Transitions into and within the daycare are extremely important. Prior connections, such as, parents and educators knowing each other before hand, an older sibling being in the daycare or a sound orientation process being in place may all affect the toddler's development. The preceding articles focus on relationships but the training of educators must also be viewed.

The most recent review of the literature unfolded readings on teacher training through narratives. Barell (1995) uses a narrative framework to promote his idea of teacher training at the primary and secondary levels. It is through an interactive process that child and adults develop thoughtfulness, as he calls thinking. Driscoll (1995) uses a narrative approach to present cases in early childhood. She focuses on teacher training but this idea is relatively new. The cases that she presents are situations from the real world as seen by herself and the participants. She shows positive problems rather than the usual way of concentrating on deficiency problems. These cases represent innovative early childhood programs from across Canada and the United States. After reading these cases I felt there was validity in my idea to have parents, educators and myself, the researcher, write narratives of experiences and for me to use a narrative of inquiry approach.

Wiltz and Fein (1996) discuss how the use of a narrative curriculum has demonstrated how children derive meaning. The researcher/practitioner can develop a deeper understanding of children's development through reading these children's stories. Noori (1996) reflects on her teaching practices, makes connections and reveals her understanding of a constructivist perspective. Through the use of narrative, both parents and educators could be empowered.

Schön (1983) in his book The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action would say that we construct knowledge through our own thinking and 'reflecting-on-action'. In other words, the practitioner through thinking about their actions gains meaning and makes changes thus developing their knowledge. Clarke (1992, 1995) has tested Schön's theory. Clarke

conducted his research using preservice teachers who were doing their practicum in normal settings. These students were normal students and not gifted such as Schön had used. Clarke had the participants reflect on their teaching along with their co-operating teachers. They reflected in various ways, framing and what he refers to as 'reframing' emerging themes. His work was useful when I began my data analysis. I reflected, framed and then 'reframed' as I sifted through the data underlining words, phrases and began to see new connections. This led me to dig deeper in my reflecting.

Walsh, Tobin and Grave (1993) also explore the use of interpretive research within the field of early childhood education. This excellent chapter states clearly the acceptance of involving practitioners in research. Interpretive research involves participants and researcher in finding deeper understanding and meaning of their daily practice. The authors refer to Paley's work as previously discussed in Weitz and Fein (1996). They suggest how "researchers and teachers can work together to jointly tell their stories, (author), and interpret research" (p.467). The use of videotaping is also explored as a "tool for producing culturally rich interpretation" (p. 468). This added validity to my desire to videotape part of my field observations. In addition in this article, ethnographic and case study approaches as well as fieldwork and interpretation are discussed.

My personal philosophy leans towards a constructivist approach to learning, as mentioned in the conceptual framework. Individuals, in order to grow and to reach their potential, must help create reality through active participation, active inquiry and discovery. We are constantly learning and creating meaning through our lived experiences. This leads to change and growth.



In a daycare context we have individuals who must interact, work together for what is best for the toddler who is receiving the care. Therefore my research was planned to draw upon lived experiences 'mine' and 'others' to better understand the larger social and cultural structures that impact on toddler group care. Narratives of individual cases can help lead to deeper understanding. A narrative of inquiry can lead to changes in the way we think, the way we do things, and to the development of ethical practices and empowerment of parents, as parents and educators engage in problem-solving and conflict-resolution through sharing and collaboration.

I have introduced the problem and I have reviewed the research literature it is now essential to state the methodology for the study.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN:

This chapter will identify the methodology used in the current research study. As mentioned in the introduction the actual research that occurred was not entirely as originally planned. Therefore I will first describe the planned methodology and then explain the changes that occurred in the actual implementation.

This study dealt with a problem that affects toddlers, their parents and the educators who care for them. The concept of daycare as a comprehensive service has already been discussed. Furthermore the problem dealt with a greater issue as daycare is a societal issue and not just that of an individual. Toddlers in disadvantaged situations are part of a family and these families need support. It also dealt with a problem-situation in education as its findings might lead to improvements in training programs for educators to be better prepared for their work with toddlers and their families.

The aim of the study was to provide greater clarity and understanding about partnerships between families in disadvantaged situations and educators in toddler settings and not to prove any theory.

A qualitative paradigm with a multidimensional approach which included action research, case and narrative of inquiry was chosen. A qualitative

paradigm fits with an inquiry process that focuses on understanding a social problem which will occur in a natural setting. Cresswell (1994) supports this choice as he points out that : "to the qualitative researcher, the only reality is that created by the individuals involved in the research situation" (p.4). Rules and procedures are not fixed and allow for more openness.

Action inquiry holds to the world view that human beings co-create their reality through participation, through their experience and through their imagination. In most qualitative research, the researcher interacts with those being studied. This means that the distance between myself and the participants would be minimized. Best (1981) has explained that since the 1930's, education and social psychology have been involved in combining the efforts of researcher and classroom teacher in studying and applying research in actual classroom settings. In other words, the focus is on the 'here and now', not in being able to validate the research universally and generally. The purpose of 'action research' is twofold. First there is a desire to improve existing ways of doing things and second, there is a desire to help the educators to develop their skills in applying these practices.

Parents and educators actively involved in co-creating their experiences in interacting with one another can help develop meaning that can possibly lead to greater awareness of the parent-educator relationship in creating partnerships. The aim is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to the participants and to empower them through the process of constructing



and using their own knowledge (Fals-Borda and Rahmin, 1991 in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 328).

In more recent times, educational researchers such as Henderson and Hawthorne (1995) refer to inquiry for the purpose of understanding what and why something is happening and what the meaning of such practice may be. Participants are involved in active participation and collaboration. Cresswell (1994) points out that phenomenological studies examine human experiences through detailed descriptions of those being studied. He refers to the roots of phenomenology as being found within the philosophy of Husserl, Heidegger, Schuler, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. A case approach offers an opportunity to study detailed descriptions of those being studied while a narrative of inquiry also involves participants in actively sharing their experiences. Zimilies (1993) has supported my interest in involving practitioners in studying the problem and not to focus on "hard data" research. Case studies within a phenomenological qualitative research design supports an ideographic approach.

Assumptions and rationale for a qualitative design are based on the literature of Merriam, 1988 in Cresswell (1994). These assumptions are that as a researcher:

- I was interested in process and not a product.
- I was seeking meaning, that is, how people make sense of their lives and experiences.

- I was the primary instrument in data collection.
- I went directly to the people in the natural setting.
- I described and interpreted the participants' narratives of experiences through my own narrative of experiences.

As previously stated, a qualitative procedure fits with my view of reality and need for close interaction with participants. Categories/patterns might emerge from my data collection but they were not to be imposed by me.

In the introduction my personal experiences in daycare were shared. Therefore I bring certain biases to this study. Although as a researcher I make every attempt to present a study that reflects the intersubjectivity of construction of the reality described, these biases may shape the way I perceive and understand the data collected. I began this study with the perspective that toddlers and their families have a right to high quality care whatever their socio-economic status. Families need support systems. I believed that family-daycare partnerships are important.

### 3.2 BOUNDARIES OF THE STUDY:

Before proceeding with the findings it is important to set the boundaries of the study, to elaborate on the procedures for data collection and to establish protocols for recording the information.

Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest four parameters for bounding a qualitative study:- setting, actors, events and process. They also state that qualitative researchers frequently have more specific sampling than random sampling.

**3.2.1 Setting:** Originally the study was to be conducted on site at one or two day care centres in the Montreal Island region. The setting was to include toddler groups. The period of the study was set at twenty-four months to allow for development of trust and sharing. The anticipated starting date was November 1995 and finishing date was established as July 1997. Sites were to be chosen according to their auspice. They were to be non-profit, parent controlled centres (4.2, "regulations respecting child care", Quebec, 1993). Parent participants would either be receiving welfare or financial aid or be experiencing social difficulties. Teen-age parents were also a consideration.

Research frequently does not occur as planned. After approaching centres who thought that they would have suitable candidates who would be willing to participate, it became evident by February 1996 that only one agency was available. Rather than lose the interest of this agency I adapted the study to one day care centre. This did not cause serious problems as one agency could represent a case. The study was shortened to occur over a four month period. The parent Board of Directors approved the study and the process began to find suitable participants.

**3.2.2 Actors:** The parent Board of Directors were involved only in the preliminary phase. They read the proposal and agreed to allow me to



conduct the research on site. The study needed the inclusion of toddlers, between eighteen months and thirty-six months and their respective families. These families would be from low socio-economic status, either on welfare or on financial aid, single parent, teen-age parent(s) or experiencing social difficulties. The participants would include four toddlers, their respective families and four educators, who were working directly with the children.

The Director would be involved as she/he would collaborate in arranging the list of possible candidates, post the requests for volunteers, arrange to collect the consent forms, provide the meeting space and share perceptions. In addition I would be an observer in the daycare and participate in meetings. Subjects were recruited on a voluntary basis and were asked to sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the study and to have their names and conversations used in case descriptions and narratives of experiences. The children's names were to be changed. Subjects needed to be living in the Island of Montreal region and their children needed to be attending the daycare in the toddler group.

Two educators, working with the toddler group volunteered to be participants. This number was sufficient as the number of families fell short of the original. In fact it made a better balance so the study was adapted. The Director of the centre also volunteered. The Director then provided a list of possible candidates who would fit at least one of the above mentioned criteria. It seemed that the project would be able to be implemented. However the first call for volunteers showed only two families who were

interested. One family signed the consent form but the other family kept forgetting to return the forms or something was always happening to prevent it. Finally the Director made arrangements with the volunteers to contact me for the particulars of the study. After speaking with families on the telephone it appeared that at least two families would be able to follow the project. Both these families had a toddler in the group with the two volunteer educators. As it happened, the only actors who participated directly were the director, the two educators and the researcher, as the parents did not follow through, and the study was adapted to report the frustrations and problems involved in gathering qualitative research data.

**3.2.3 Events and Processes:** When originally preparing the study possible problems were explored. It had been a worry that participants might not be able to attend meetings and therefore every attempt was made to arrange a convenient time and to provide for child care. Every attempt was made to provide a balance for the study. As parents and educators would be recording their lived experiences and sharing feelings with the researcher at parent-educator sessions it became very important to involve all participants in the planning of these sessions.

As an ecological framework was being used for the study, other forces at work such as family support systems, work satisfaction, the child care environment, the auspice of the program, the educators availability and the external community were all considered. The research literature suggested that communications were important in building the parent-educator partnership. Questions that came to mind when beginning the study were:

Would it matter when or where these interactions could occur? Who decides? Tensions and conflicts between parents and educators have been studied by Galinsky (1988), but how and why they occur need to be studied further. I wished to better understand what practical considerations, such as time constraints, practical realities or restrictions, prevent the fostering of positive parent-educator communication and partnerships?

Endsley, Minish and Zhou (1993) found that the majority of parent-teacher communication occur at 'transition times' and last approximately twelve seconds. Galinsky & Weissbourd (1992) have promoted the idea of family centred child care where the perceptions of parent involvement is different from the traditional types of parent programs that have been offered in the past. Traditionally three main types of parent education programs have been promoted. Parent contact was basically a program giving information to parents and was very '*top-down*'; the educators were shown to have the knowledge and parents should receive it and follow through. The second type of parent education program involved setting up parent discussion groups to discuss issues of supposed interest to parents. The problem has been that most of these issues were chosen again by the 'authorities' and not generated by the families nor were they involved in choosing the time frame, etc. The third approach has been to teach specific parenting skills. All of these approaches are based on a '*top-down*' system. They are not family-friendly and only add to frustrations of educators who again feel let down when the programs are not well attended. If these parent education programs are not suitable for today's situations, then what can early childhood training programs do to help prepare educators to better



understand and respond to a variety of parental needs and especially those of parents in disadvantaged situations?

An introduction meeting was arranged in early May 1996 for everyone interested in participating. This meeting was scheduled according to the availability of the parents and there would be child care available for the toddlers at the centre. It was agreed that we could join together for a light meal at the end of the session. However on the day of the meeting one family canceled at the last moment and the other parent did not show up.

Another attempt was made to involve parents in the study and some adjustments were suggested to make it more feasible. This process brought two more families as possible participants but they were not in disadvantaged circumstances. These families were only interested in participating in videotaped field observations and telephone conversations. They explained that they did not have sufficient time to attend parent-educator sessions. It was not explicitly stated, but there seemed to be some hesitancy to commit themselves to the study and, in the end, they did not participate at all and the project did not occur as planned. The frustrations of the researcher includes excerpts of the conversations with one family. We were now into the month of June 1996 and parents were beginning to arrange their holiday schedules. In addition, the educators would be leaving during July and August for their own vacations. One educator was leaving to take another position elsewhere at the end of August and informed the researcher that she/he would not be available to continue. The study was

again adapted to concentrate on the frustrations, feelings, perceptions and experiences of the participants who did attempt to work with the researcher.

The focus of this project was on the daily experiences and practices of the participants within the scope of the research question and the perceptions and meaning of their narratives. I was one of the instruments for data collection. Due to my not being employed at the daycare centre, participant observation was difficult. However a schedule was arranged for field observations. Participants would also be involved in detailed descriptions of lived experiences, narratives of experience, which could lead to meaning and understanding. The use of a phenomenological design could result in a phenomenological description of themes and patterns (Cresswell, 1994).

Reality showed that the project was not able to unfold as planned. The study, with the permission of my adviser, was adapted to explain the troubles and frustrations of the participants who did participate in the beginnings of the study, being the director, the two educators and myself, the researcher. Their stories and perceptions are shared in Chapters four and five.

—Procedures for Data Collection— I will now describe the data collection procedures. It is important to understand that the data collection procedures that I intended to use were not perceived in a quantifiable sense of the word. A multi-approach to data-collection was to be employed. A greater understanding of qualitative research has led me to realize that it is important to define “relationships”. Cresswell (1994) suggests refraining

from using words which convey a cause and effect manner of thinking when doing qualitative research studies. I was using the word "relationships" not in a quantitative way as is generally used. In other words, I was not thinking of relationships between data-objects, but rather simply interactions between people. I did not intend to focus on outcomes or a product, but rather I wished to gain a better understanding of how training programs might use this information.

It is important to outline the structures that were planned for the research. Miles and Huberman (1984) discuss the importance of having some structure in place before the fieldwork begins but I did not wish to be too rigid. They offer arguments for and against prior instrumentation. In addition they suggest that it is helpful to analyze data simultaneously to data collection. Therefore I planned to follow their advice. This would allow me to see themes emerging and to probe deeper in certain areas. As the data collection procedures are discussed, links are made to the data analysis procedures that were planned.

Originally the strategies for empirical inquiry included **field observations, videotaping of one or two field observations, parent-educator intervention sessions, educator telephone conversations and journal keeping**. Each of these instruments and the changes that occurred in the study are described in detail.



## FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Field observations of parent-educator interactions at various times of the day and various stages were originally planned. These observations could provide data on how interactions affect parent-educator partnerships and in turn how they affect the quality of care as perceived by the families and the educators. Observations were planned to occur over a twelve month period and to last two hours each. Five field observations were planned. They would occur after the first three sessions with parents and educators. This would allow all participants to become more relaxed and to build trust. These observations would be unstructured and occur in the daycare setting at transition times. The researcher would have some key items in mind, such as parent-educator verbal communications and body language, parent-child interactions, educator-child interactions and transitions from home to daycare. Details of observations were to be recorded in a field notebook and a field diary would be kept to record my own thinking, feelings, experiences and perceptions. Field notes as described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994) would form part of the field text in later narratives of experiences.

The protocol to record observations was to be a single page with a dividing line down the middle to divide descriptive notes and reflective notes. Cresswell (1994). Descriptive notes were to include such things as, description of the physical setting, accounts of particular events and a reconstruction of dialogue. Reflective notes would include personal thoughts, feelings and impressions. The left side would have a margin to

record the date, time and place. These handwritten fieldnotes would be transcribed before being analyzed. They would be written up so that other people would be able to understand them. This would allow me to add back any missing content from the observations. These write-ups would then be transferred to a contact summary sheet similar to the type which Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest. This contact sheet would contain a series of questions with accompanying answers from the write-ups. There would be a space to identify the site location, the contact, the date and time and the names; there would also be a space for reflective remarks. These summaries would provide questions for possible use in the parent-educator sessions. An observation grid was to be used for data analysis. Emerging themes would be coded with patterns such as, TH for theme. Miles and Huberman (1984) explain that a code is simply an abbreviation or a symbol applied to a group of words. Codes are categories. I thought it was important to develop coding systems as it would be helpful in ongoing analysis. They would provide direction for the research and help me to set up agendas for future parent-educator sessions.

This was modified before the study was to begin to a four month period and only three observation sessions. It has already been pointed out that there were problems in finding centres and participants for the study. In reality the field observations did not occur because families were hesitant to sign the consent forms to allow the researcher to observe their children or to videotape them. It was not possible to only videotape two families interacting with educators as families entrance and exit into the daycare overlapped. Therefore there were no field observations and thus no field observation notes or protocols to transcribe for data analysis.

## VIDEOTAPING

The second data collection instrument was the use of videotaping. Originally two field observation sessions were to be videotaped. These sessions would capture 'transition time' interactions. It was thought that tensions and conflicts might be made more explicit. These tapes would then be used for 'stimulated recall' at parent-educator sessions. They were originally scheduled to occur after a few months of beginning the study. This would allow the participants to become more trusting of the researcher.

The reality of the situation was that videotaping did not occur. The participants who volunteered for the project did not all agree to be videotaped. As previously explained the research study did not follow the schedule nor was it actually conducted. The reasons for the study not occurring were partly due to the fact that families did not return consent forms or did not wish to participate. The frustrations and feelings of the researcher and the educators will be shown in the narratives later. Therefore, there was no video data collected for analysis.

## PARENT-EDUCATOR INTERVENTION SESSIONS

Parent-educator intervention sessions were planned as another part of the data collection. These sessions were to be scheduled to suit the participants needs. The first introductory session was arranged for early evening at 5:00



p.m. at the daycare centre. This time was chosen after the initial feedback from the possible participants in the study. The sessions would be held at different times and would include a Saturday morning time frame. The researcher was extremely flexible in order to meet the needs of the participants. The sessions were originally to last one and a half hours with a pre-session with the educators. There would be twelve sessions, including an introductory and a closing session. This number was adapted when the study was shortened to a four month period. Two sessions with an additional closing session were to be the revised number. However, in the event, only the introductory parent-educator session occurred and as mentioned previously the parents did not show up. The format for these sessions was fairly open as I felt that it was important that parents be involved in the decision-making process. At the same time some issues and concerns would be suggested. An example was the transition from home to daycare and feelings about whether the parent felt that the educators liked their child. These sessions would be recorded through note-taking. These notes were to be transcribed in a similar fashion as the field observations. The last thirty minutes of each session was set aside for sharing a 'potluck' meal.

Themes, topics were not to be forced upon the participants but the researcher would watch for common threads which seemed to be emerging in the data collection and would then probe with questions. Sessions could begin with sharing of stories and experiences. Participants would also be encouraged to share feelings, reflections from journals at these sessions. Informal sessions that included recall for educators and families could help to identify feelings, frustrations and might lead to developing strategies to

improve parent-educator partnerships. This could even help training programs find ways to better train educators to develop the partnership.

An introductory parent-educator session was scheduled for early May. However, neither of the parents attended; one canceled at the last minute, and the other simply didn't show up. The two educators were present and the researcher finally proceeded with them, keeping notes using a "field sheet" set up in similar fashion to that proposed for the protocol for observations. There were spaces to identify the location, date, time and names. The page was divided in half for descriptive notes and reflective notes.

Time was spent reviewing the intended study and the feelings of the educators. The session lasted forty-five minutes. The researcher remained another 15 minutes in hope that the parent who had not canceled might arrive, but finally had to leave and left a note for the parent to contact her at home.

#### **EDUCATOR PRE-SESSIONS**

Educator pre-sessions were organized to last thirty minutes originally but these sessions were revised to last fifteen minutes prior to the parent-educator sessions. The purpose for these sessions was to provide the educators with an opportunity to think about the session and to go over their journals. Only one educator pre-session occurred, this being held fifteen minutes prior to the abortive parent-educator session described above. The

educators even then expressed concern as to whether the parents would come.

Educator telephone sessions were also arranged to allow for feedback. These conversations would be noted for later transcription and were scheduled to occur bi-monthly. The conversations were to last twenty minutes approximately.

In the event, telephone conversations did occur between the educator participants and the researcher, and notes were taken of these conversations by the researcher. The majority of the time however was spent talking about the concerns of the educators that families were not signing consent forms or attending meetings but general themes did emerge; ie, parent's hesitancy to sign forms, parents lack of time.

#### **JOURNAL-KEEPING**

Journals were to be kept by all of the participants in the study. The format of the journals was loose leaf style. The left margin was reserved for recording codes of emerging themes and key words. The date, time, setting and name was to appear at the right top corner. The right margin was kept for comments. The researcher would also maintain a journal on the processes of the study, lived experiences, feelings and thoughts.

Once again the fact that the study was not implemented as planned affected the journal writing. As the frustrations mounted and the study was adapted,



the educators who had volunteered were asked to record their thoughts in a journal. Somehow they did not record on a regular basis as they felt frustrated or told the researcher that they had lost their motivation. One educator took ill and did not record anything and the other educator participant provided a two page summary of thoughts. The Director wrote nothing in his journal and only the researcher kept journal entries.

## INTERVIEWS

The researcher adapted the study again and arranged to hold individual, unstructured interviews with the educators and the Director, intended to allow the participants to reflect on their experiences, feelings and frustrations since the study was started. As a qualitative researcher, it was important for me to establish a rapport, empathy and understanding between myself as interviewer and the participant as interviewee. I felt at this point in the study that it was not appropriate to direct questions or begin to mechanically code responses to prove some theory. These conversations were recorded and the tapes then transcribed by the researcher.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest this method produces the most correct record of what is said. I chose this method as it would provide opportunities for me to clarify points, go back to earlier points and perhaps raise fresh questions. It was important that individuals could reveal personal material to the researcher. At times, the unstructured interviews became conversations. Conversations constitute an important source of data and

were mentioned previously as I used telephone conversations both with the educators and the parents (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

There was one unstructured interview with the director lasting approximately one hour, which took place in his office at the daycare. Another was arranged with one of the educator participants. It took place on a bench in the local park away from other people. It also lasted about an hour, though it was a little rushed at the end because she was on her lunch hour. The researcher's role in each of these unstructured interviews was not to direct but to listen as each participant shared his or her perceptions, feelings and frustrations about the process of setting up the study, to probe when the participant hesitated or had difficulty recalling events or emotions. I prepared a rough checklist of areas to explore with each participant. These items would be very open guides to help the participant think about the process, feelings and frustrations that were experienced in attempting to proceed with the study. The second participating educator did not feel comfortable being recorded and was not eager to relive the experience. He agreed to express himself in a journal entry; this was two pages in length.

After conducting the unstructured interviews, I began the process of data analysis. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) provide guidelines for qualitative analysis of interview and conversational materials. Schön (1983) was also helpful to me in understanding the process of reflection for my own teaching practice. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) discuss the use of personal experience methods and subsequent analysis of conversations. I found that their ideas were comfortable for me as I entered the study with the

philosophy of building a relationship that was equal. I regarded the participants as fellow researchers with whom I had the responsibility to build a collegial relationship. The basic philosophy was one of respect and mutual learning. As mentioned previously I intended to be flexible and to have participants establish the form and topics that were important to their building the partnership and in retelling their story. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) point out that conversations require listening. The listener may then use a probe to take the participant further in their thinking. My data analysis included transcribing the tapes verbatim but then I followed their advice. I listened to the audiotapes several times to gain a sense of the whole and to appreciate any silences, pauses, tone, nuances, hesitations etc. I read and reread the transcripts and all written materials several times, asking the question what word(s), phrase(s) or statement(s) seem essential or seem to reveal what is really meant about the experience being described. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) refer to patterns, common threads, tensions and themes and having the participants check my writing. This helped to develop points of importance and guided me in writing revisions of their stories. They also mention that field texts need to be transferred to research texts. It is these research texts that give meaning to the experience and grow out of the repeated asking of questions (p.423). This could also be referred to as a form of reflective analysis. Schön (1983) proposes that knowledge is personally constructed as we act upon our actions; experiment; become curious about some element and reframe our thinking and plan for future action. As I wrote and rewrote these stories I reflected and tried to dig deeper; to search out the meaning of what was being said by the participant.



The next stage included looking at “units of meaning”, i.e., larger themes and issues which recur frequently. I then attempted to relate these to the topic of partnerships. The next step was to explore the major themes that emerged from the data and to relate them to the original topic if possible. In the process of the unstructured interviews, the participants had the opportunity to sit down, take stock, and reflect on what had happened since the study began. Data analysis included reflective analysis, during which the researcher ruminated on the themes exposed in her own reflections and in those of others. The themes that emerged were time, communicating fear or hesitancy to get involved.

The narratives of experiences that emerged from these unstructured interviews and telephone conversations were used to form part of the narrative stories in Chapter four and five.

#### **VERIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

Verification for the study was done through internal validity that is, the coherence of what was said at different moments on certain themes and external validity, the coherence with the situations and the use of triangulation, i.e., multiple methods of data collections were employed (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 104). Data collection in reality did include telephone conversations, unstructured interviews, some journal-keeping and an introductory session where notes were kept. Verbal feedback from the Director and educators was received on an on-going basis. After writing my story about the director and the educators, I gave it to

the participants to read and asked them to underline the points, words, phrases or statements that were important. Underlining seems to help people identify significant words. According to Jones (1993, p. 29), this helps participants make meaning for themselves about their practice. The director felt that there was no need for any changes but the educators provided further reflections which led to one or two additions. The participants were able to tell me whether my interpretation of their conversations, reflections in unstructured interviews, session, etc. were correct and thus had validity. A member check including the conclusions chapter was done again before final submission of the completed thesis.

In any research project there are always ethical considerations. As a researcher I had an obligation to respect the rights, values and desires of the participants. Sensitive information could have been shared therefore I had the daycare centre parent Board of Directors agree to allow the study. I had all participants sign consent forms to participate in the study and to allow all written, audio and video materials to be used for research. This proved to be one of the biggest deterrents to the study occurring as families seemed hesitant to sign. All information was shared with possible participants before agreeing. Participants were given a brief proposal outlining the study and the parameters as to how the centre was chosen, disruption to the centre, how information would be used, data collection devices and activities

These were the boundaries of the study and after two months it was agreed that sufficient data had been collected and some possible themes had

emerged that might show some interesting aspects of parent-educator partnerships. It was decided to use the 'narratives' of the researcher, educators and the Director to show the troubles that the researcher encountered in trying to accomplish the project.

The following table summarizes the actual data collected and the instruments used.



ACTORS	INSTRUMENTS	TYPE OF DATA
Researcher	Journal Telephone conversation notes Introductory educator pre-session sheet Introductory parent-educator session sheet notes	Contact with parent 1 Contact with parent 2 Contact with parent 3 Contact with parent 4  Contact with Director Contact with educators
Educator 1	Telephone notes  1 Pre-session meeting (15 mins.)  1 Educator-parent introductory session (45 mins) Notes from above meetings  1 Unstructured interview (1 hour)	Contact with toddlers' daily care-giving Contact with parents to collect forms Contact with parents to point out researcher's sign Contact with director for follow-up of consent forms, reminders Tape recorded conversation
Educator 2	Telephone notes  1 Pre-session meeting (15 mins.)  1 Educator-parent introductory session (45 mins.) Notes from above meetings Journal entry	Contact with toddlers' daily care-giving Contact with parents to collect forms Contact with director for follow-up of consent forms, reminders Journal summary
Director	Meeting to review proposal  Telephone  Proposal to parent board of directors  Unstructured interview	Contact with parent board to present proposal Contact with parents (call for volunteers) Contact with parents - consent forms Contact with participating

		educators
Parent 1	Telephone conversations Parent-educator introductory session (parent cancelled)	Contact with director (preliminary stages of study) Contact with researcher (indicating interest in participation) Contact with educator
Parent 2	Telephone conversations Parent-educator introductory session (parent did not show)	Contact with director (preliminary stages of study) Contact with researcher (indicating interest in participation) Contact with educator
Parent 3	Telephone conversation (20-30 mins.)	Contact with director Contact with researcher
Parent 4	Telephone conversation (20-30 mins.)	Contact with director Contact with researcher

The next chapters offer case descriptions of the participants, which are intended to take the reader into the minds of the individuals involved, to help the reader understand the situations encountered in attempting to carry out the study. The stories, which combine a case approach with narratives, are detailed. The names of the participants have been changed, but in telling their stories, I have tried to honour their words, their feelings and their frustrations, as expressed in the unstructured interviews and telephone conversations. However, my reflections on the participants' practices may be clouded by "the lens of my own values and philosophy" (Driscoll, 1995, p. 5).

Eisner (1991) says, "Qualitative inquiry can help us to understand individual classrooms and teachers and at the same time help us to understand other schools and classrooms" (p. 12). I hope that reading these stories may help early childhood students, professionals and instructors in training programs to acquire a deeper understanding of the problems encountered in developing partnerships between these families and educators, and their possible impact on their children's development, and to help us develop strategies to overcome some of the barriers to partnership building.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Educators' Tales

In this chapter I present the 'narratives' or 'tales' of the director and the educators who participated in the research. Before reading these narratives however it would be helpful for the reader to visualize the setting where these stories occur. Driscoll (1995) promotes the idea of locating stories in their social context. The day care center as mentioned previously is a non-profit, parent-controlled center. It is located in a quiet suburban area of Western Montreal. As you approach it's entrance you cannot help but be amazed by it's green setting. It is located on the edge of a city park and is surrounded by greenery. There are small rolling hills with a variety of play equipment. On the far side of the park you can see the English elementary school and a community chalet. A bicycle path beckons you to follow to the wooded area beyond. The architecture of the center blends in with the adjacent middle class homes in the area. Walking up the path to the center one can almost hear the sounds of toddlers laughter. Demographically anglophone and allophones prevail. The majority of families using the services of the center live in the surrounding neighborhood or work near by. The parents careers range from trades people to engineers, lawyers and self-employed business people. There are two official languages spoken in the center but English seems to be dominant. The director and the two educators are white middle class and they too live in the area. I have chosen the pseudonym Luc to represent the director. The names, Jake and

Anna portray the two educators. The chapter is organized into the telling of their individual stories but there is no significance in the order chosen. The first section of the chapter introduces the story of the director. The second part presents the stories of the two educators. Their narratives are descriptive and rich in detail. My intention is to take the reader into the minds of the individuals involved to help the reader understand the events that occurred while attempting to conduct the study. Through the unfolding of their stories each of the participants was able to make meaning of what happened. Meaning is constructed from the data contained in these conversations, interviews and tapes. Interpretation of the results is my understanding and therefore may be clouded by "the lens of my own values" (Driscoll, 1995, p. 5). Validity checks with each of the participants has provided feedback and led to changes in the final stories. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings and some conclusions are presented.

#### 4.1 LUC'S TALE:

This is the story of Luc, the director of the non-profit, parent-controlled day care center used in the study. He has a degree in Early Childhood Education, has been an early childhood educator and a director for many years. He has participated in professional associations both on the Board of Directors and on various committees. He takes every opportunity to advocate quality childcare for children. Luc is also a parent and has had his children in child care during their formative years. He is involved in community endeavors and coaches a local soccer team for children.



This is his story, narrated by me, the researcher. It is based on the transcript from an audiotaped unstructured interview which occurred in his office in July 1996. When I entered the center I felt a hum of activity. It was the end of the lunch period and educators and toddlers were preparing for naptime. A young toddler could be heard crying and the educator, in a soothing tone of voice, was reassuring the child that mama would be coming back after snack. Luc's office is located across the hallway from the two toddler rooms and next to the kitchen. Staff in the kitchen were bustling around cleaning up after lunch. Luc was busy talking on the telephone and gestured to me to come in. Although he welcomed me I felt as though I was intruding as there was an 'air of tension'. His gaze was elsewhere and his body language was different from his words of greeting. He pointed to me to take a seat and let me know that he would be ready to start shortly. The original research project was at a standstill as we had experienced many delays and had found that we would not be able to complete the research as originally attempted. As explained in the methodology chapter I had adapted the study in hopes that we would be able to continue and to collect data. The purpose of this interview was to probe more deeply into the feelings, frustrations and emotions that Luc had experienced and to reflect on what had occurred during the past three months. Through sharing we could derive meaning of what had occurred. A validity check has been provided by sharing the transcripts of our taped interview and then this narrated story.



Luc began his story by starting at the beginning. In 1995 when I first started to prepare for my research study, Luc attended an early childhood conference where we became involved in a discussion about infant and toddler care. He showed an interest in participating in my research topic. He was currently investigating the possibility of expanding the daycare permit to provide infant care. Research has shown that there is a growing need for infant/toddler group care due to more women returning to the labour force. In Luc's case the location of the centre increased the need for infant/toddler care as there were many young families moving into the area. Quality care is essential for young children. As previously pointed out it is not a matter of whether group care is good or bad for this age group but rather it is the quality of care provided that affects young children. After listening to a brief description of my interest in pursuing parent-educator partnership building in disadvantaged settings and the type of research that I planned, he thought that the center where he worked might meet the criteria. Even then Luc mentioned that he supported the concept of qualitative research and the idea of parent-educator interactions. Later when the project began he again referred to the importance of research in helping the practitioner in their every day professional life. In the taped interview he reflected and said :“research is what helps us in our practical....It helps us know what we are doing... gives us feedback, it gives me ideas about how to do things better” (interview, July,1996).

In March 1996 Luc accepted a detailed overview of the study. After reading it we met to clarify the criteria for participation in the study and to answer questions that the parent board might have regarding the time,

confidentiality, involvement, etc. Luc showed excitement at finally being able to participate. He felt that people doing research often have difficulty in finding places who will cooperate but he likes to read research and to learn from it so he felt that the parent board would be interested in supporting the study once he met with them and explained the overview of the study. "The practitioner has a part to play...helps to make the link between quantitative and qualitative research" (notes, unstructured interview, July, 1996). Approval for the centre to be involved was received in April 1996. This was necessary as the researcher would be interacting with parents, educators and the director.

Luc continued his story with recalling why he felt comfortable in participating in the study. He shared his feelings that research helped him in his daily practice and that he wanted to get feedback in finding out which ways worked in his interactions with parents in disadvantaged situations. He talked about how he felt that frequently families who were in extreme circumstances often felt overwhelmed and that they needed support systems. "...and when that parent had to leave because her child was biting and having so many problems...yet we couldn't accommodate any more." He thought that this project seemed really open and would help the center improve their rapport with families. He liked the ecological approach. Practitioners are often intuitive but need to understand why we do things and what actually works (Luc, interview, July, 1996). When he talked about the family leaving the center, there seemed to be a genuine feeling of sadness that the center had not been able to extend their service further for this child and his parent and consequently the family had not been able to fulfill its commitment to the research project. However the daycare had



worked closely with the parent to help the parent find another childcare arrangement and to receive help from psychological counseling services but I began to realize that Luc was having difficulty understanding the parent's perspective. This had also been confirmed in my telephone conversation with the mother.

Luc thought about the events of the last three months and began to recall what occurred. The process of contacting families who were registered in this particular age group and who met at least one of the criteria for the study had been completed. It was only then that he realized that there were an unusually low number of families who met the criteria. He had not shared this information with the researcher before the study began. There were however three families who fit at least one of the criteria. Two of these families had shown an interest in joining the study. He chose to contact families himself to let them know about the study. He felt it was important to maintain confidentiality and that he could not share telephone numbers. He also thought these same families might be inhibited by a stranger approaching them. Most of these families were not familiar or had not previously participated in any research studies. "none of these families have participated in research...what you do...what you are trying to do...how it can help us in our practical life...maybe they were afraid...maybe from the school system...maybe they had bad experiences...never done scientific...people's ability not coming from the same perspective that we are coming from...maybe that was part of the problem." In reflection we began to realize that perhaps there would have been better ways to approach the families and then they would have felt more ready to participate. I mentioned that I had started to think that maybe if I had



produced a short video clip for parents to view that they may have found it easier. Luc picked up on this idea and suggested that we could have sent home 8-10 copies for home viewing. He realized however that it would have required more of our time. He commented that "it's important to communicate openly and to work together for the children". Participants were to volunteer for the study but maybe they were frightened and felt too vulnerable. Luc recalled that once a family showed an interest in pursuing involvement in the study they received a brief description and then were encouraged to contact me as my telephone number had been provided. "Even then there seemed to be some hesitancy" (interview, July, 1996). Luc stated that he began to experience some difficulty in reaching parents. He had let me know that parents were not checking in with him or he was too busy with all the other responsibilities of being a daycare director. He called it the 'realities of life in the daycare'. It also seemed to be caused by the realities of these families lives. They had a tendency to avoid situations as pointed out later by the educators. We had worked together to find a solution and Luc remained committed to pursuing the families. However he recalled that he had begun to feel frustrated. He also had sensed my frustration and anxiety in our regular telephone conversations although I had also been supportive. We had agreed that I would increase the number of field observations and decrease the number of parent-educator sessions. We agreed that a notice might be helpful as it was now mid-April. I prepared some large flyers to post on the toddler classroom door. Consent forms were provided for families to sign once they had decided that they were interested in participating. Luc had tried to pursue these same families to check that they had signed and had returned the forms. This proved to be frustrating for everyone and held up the study as families did not follow

through. "It is so difficult to make things happen.. so difficult to do so many jobs/things at the same time. I'd like to have more time to make sure that things happen...a common experience in daycare...be much more satisfied with the work that we did...and still find that even though fully what you need to do...messages waiting for you...even trying to call you some days. Time seems to always be a problem. We can't devote attention to it. I have tried to catch parents but they sometimes do not stop by my office."

Luc means well but throughout the period of the research and again during the interview it became evident that effective communication is not one of his strengths. He begins to communicate but then forgets to call or to follow up on an issue. This can increase the tensions when parents are also caught up in the stresses of every day coping.

As Luc talked time seemed to emerge as an important theme. He discussed the various ways they use at the center to communicate with families:- memos, bulletin boards, class door posters, newsletters and verbal reminders or exchanges. "We find that families don't empty their bags... yes...now's the time to take a look for notices, the only time we notice is because of the art communication system...I go to the educators and say make sure you ask the parent to clear out the mailbox to-night...your notice for instance, that's when they notice whether returned or not...maybe we were too nice and patient" (interview tapes, 1996).

Luc perceived the problems of communication being with the parents but the results show that the communication systems that are practiced at the daycare are part of what Galinsky (1988), Workman and Gage (1994) refer to as a 'top-down' system. That is, parents are not empowered to decide



together what forms of communication are relevant for them. Luc's tone of voice and body language indicated a 'schism', a "we" "them" effect. Galinsky's (1988) findings referred to the importance of effective communications by the administrator. This increases the barrier to communication and a sense of partnership-building. Again families are not helped to understand the importance of sharing in communications.

When Luc reflected on his experience he commented that there had been a communication problem in that group since September "...we had two parent-teacher nights for them...that on both occasions.. they had plenty of notice but couldn't come.. important to be there...this is their child...how could they not take time to come...difficult balancing being a parent and understanding where they are coming from..." At this point in the interview there was a sense of frustration that seemed to be coming not just from the research but also from a philosophical perspective. These feelings have also been replicated in research findings of Endsley, Minish and Zhou (1993), Workman and Gage (1994), Shimoni and Baxter (1996). Luc explained that the daycare had even adjusted their times for meetings with parents. "...start sessions at 4:00 p.m. We pay substitutes to come in to relieve educators but... It's really frustrating. We had two families who signed up for your study but then... They did the same thing at meeting times..." He spoke about the role that families play in actually scheduling time to talk but it was not clear whether it was developed from a 'family strengths' model. He referred to the 'hurried child syndrome' perhaps being a 'hurried family syndrome' as parents seem to be overloaded. Luc then recounted his feeling of disappointment and frustration when the parent did not call or show up for the introductory parent-educator session. He thought



that perhaps if he had spent more time in communicating with the parents that he might have been able to explain the importance of the research and even have helped them feel comfortable. As mentioned the results show that communication on his part was not effective. Later in Anna's tale there is reference to a lack of support in communicating to the families the need and the importance of communicating.

Luc returned to the feelings of frustration that we all experienced at the aborted parent-educator session. He talked excitedly about how promising it looked when I finally managed to arrange a session that fit everyone's schedules. He had arranged for the space to be available at the center and had prepared staff to cover while the parents were attending the session. Even then I had called him to check that he had followed through on communicating to replacement staff. We were ready to have a short supper together but... Even as he recounted the events that occurred there was a sense of frustration and a feeling of disappointment in both his voice and body gestures. We both felt let down and he mentioned how it was difficult to put into words how he felt then and now. We cannot judge others. Again we remembered how each of us is affected by outside forces, the external world. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that each unit interacts and is affected by the other parts and together they form a whole. Pence (1988) suggested that the person's health and well-being is connected to and affected by the environment. Luc recalled that one parent had come to the center that day by taxi as she had experienced car troubles. He commented that he should have realized then that there may have been a problem but he was distracted with other problems and responsibilities at the center. The

results show that the different microsystems of the daycare, the parents and the parents home were blocking effective communication. In addition he related how this family was recently faced with more family problems as the child had been experiencing increased difficulties at the center. We were both aware at this time of the problems as the parent had later spoken with me about them. There was a feeling of frustration that the support systems were not sufficient to enable the center to reach out far enough to help this child remain at the centre. This reflects the importance of the 'exosystem' on families and the daycare. This led to a discussion about the other families' possible reasons for backing out of the study. One had cancelled just prior to the meeting. He said that they always seemed to have something get in the way when it came time. Another parent couldn't participate because her husband worked seven days a week and she had to pick up an older sibling plus the toddler. Stevens *et al* (1993) found that parent's behavior is influenced by their social relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Families cannot operate in isolation. Luc mentioned how I had been so flexible in trying to assure that everything could happen. I had even offered to go to families homes; to meet with them separately and to shorten the number of sessions. He reflected that families are really short of time; often they just don't have support systems to help out. Through the process of reflection he commented that perhaps we that is, the center, needs to change our thinking about parent involvement. He thought that the centre offered many possibilities for families to be involved but perhaps it was not sufficient. He recounted that the daycare was a parent-controlled center so they had a very open-door policy which encouraged families to get involved and that they saw the daycare as an 'extended family'. The results show that the format of parent involvement that Luc sees as important is not



necessarily valid for today's parents, especially those in disadvantaged settings. Frequently these families do not have the support systems or the economic resources to provide child care, etc. to allow them to participate. At the 'mesosystem' level families' work commitments can interfere with their ability to volunteer. If we consider that communication is not effective then it also infers that families do not understand what parent involvement means or that they do not wish to participate. Luc seemed to be asking how do we find ways to involve families who need us the most but don't seem able to be consistent? This actually fits with the most recent research findings of Workman and Gage (1994), Shimoni and Baxter (1996) and Wilson (1997).

Another concern for Luc was that the communication systems that the centre was using did not seem to work consistently. He seemed to be confirming Powell's (1989) findings that parents and educators communicate for very short periods of time at arrival and departure. However these are times when educators are generally not in sufficient numbers as groups are blended. The operating hours in most daycare centres are quite long and therefore educators schedules must be staggered. The results of Luc's reflections show that daily communications did not occur with families as Luc, Anna and Jake did not manage to talk to them.

Luc recollected that he began to realize that there might be a problem with fulfilling the commitment to participate in the research as educators and families at the centre would begin to leave on vacation. In some cases some of the toddlers would be changing groups so this would create another set of problems as parents and the educators, who were participating in the study would not see each other on a regular basis. "...it became a time



limitation as families that were signed up for the research...might already have changed classes...that's right...end of July families move up".

He felt that perhaps the criteria had too many limitations. He realized that the toddler groups only had 8-10 children and the criteria listed single parent, low-income, experiencing socio-economic problems. Perhaps if we had started in September we would have had a better chance as new families tend to become involved. He recounted that in previous research projects families had not been directly involved. Previous studies had been quantitative and only with children in the older age groups. Families had signed forms for children to be observed but the parents did not participate or spend time with the researchers. Nothing like my project had been done in the past. It was exciting and would have been helpful in their practice.

Overall effective communication is not one of Luc's assets. The communication systems in place are based on a traditional model, a 'top-down' system, which does not foster secure trusting partnerships with families in disadvantaged situations. It does not consider all the other 'microsystems' that are interacting with the daycare, such as, the family's home or work commitments or how the families perceived their participation in the study. Although the daycare is a non-profit, parent-controlled center the partnerships with some families is not as strong as first perceived.

It is now time to introduce the reader to Jake and Anna, the two educators from the toddler group. As previously explained these are pseudonyms. Their stories are recounted by myself, the researcher. I have translated

their narratives using my own understanding of their words. A validity check has helped me to correct any misunderstandings. Jake's story is shared first. It is based on our telephone conversations, educator pre-session and his journal reflection while Anna's story is based on the transcripts of the audiotaped unstructured interview, telephone conversations and the educator pre-session. The reader may notice some similarities in their tales. Overall there is a sense of frustration which is indicative of their feeling at times of not being valued for the work that they do for families. This provides a source of tension. Their stories also confirm that the communication systems at the daycare are not always effective.

## 4.2 JAKE'S TALE:

This is the story of Jake. He lives in the area where the center is located. He has been an educator for approximately five years. I first met Jake in an introductory course at the CEGEP college where I teach. Even then he showed an interest in growing and learning and was self-motivated although he appeared to be quite quiet in large class discussions. As part of his term project he interviewed the director of the centre used in the research study. The director was so impressed with his commitment and openness to learning that he offered him a position as a replacement educator. Jake has commented that it 'felt good to be asked'. It was not long before he became a regular employee. He continued to study Early Childhood while also pursuing his studies at the university level in a related field.

When I began the study Jake was at first somewhat hesitant to participate. He expressed that as much as he was eager to learn and to think about his practice, he found it difficult to write and to talk in groups but discovered that it helped him to know that even researchers can share these same fears. We talked about how we can learn from tapes, writing about our daily practice and he gradually relaxed as we all shared our feelings and thoughts about the purpose of research and how we felt about parent involvement. He did not feel comfortable however to be videotaped but agreed that he would consider it. Jake was not certain whether he would be able to "sacrifice the time" but began to feel that it was important to him and therefore he would manage it (journal reflection, 20/07/96). It is interesting that the theme of time emerges in all the stories. It seems to have been a major barrier to allowing the research to occur.

Jake talked on the telephone with me during the period of setting up the study. Although he seemed eager to move forward with the research his tone of voice began to show an increasing disappointment and he talked about feelings of frustration. He was trying to reach families to have them sign and to return their consent forms but they just didn't seem to manage to see each other or else they said that they would leave the forms for Anna as they had been too busy. In reality the communication system was a barrier to developing trust and effective open communication between himself and the families. He was feeling exhausted just trying to catch the parents. What he seemed to be indicating was that it is not always easy to connect with families as their schedules do not always blend with the educator's shift or



perhaps they didn't really understand the importance or that we were not able to make it seem important enough. In addition there are so many other daily communications needed that there was not sufficient time to discuss other items. Finally in the beginning of May we were to have our introductory parent-educator session. The time had been arranged to fit everyone's schedules. The director had made arrangements for extra staff to care for the children. Jake felt re-energized. He seemed surprised that we had managed to get everyone together at a time that was convenient for all. At the educator pre-session he asked for clarification about the families who were to participate. He expressed that he thought that it would be easier for him to open up as he felt comfortable with the two families who had volunteered for the study. However it was interesting that even then he questioned me as to whether the families were actually going to attend. I did not pick up on this until I reflected back and reread my notes from the session. There seemed to be a hint of frustration and even disappointment as Jake had mentioned that there is always some reason but they always cancel at the last minute. This can be interpreted that there is a feeling of not being valued by parents and a lack of understanding of the external forces that are affecting families' ability to interact. There was some discussion of one of the toddlers having a problem with his increasingly inappropriate behaviours at the center. His tone of voice showed frustration. Jake is not a parent himself but in our conversations he has spoken about trying to see things from a parent's perspective. However I felt that he was also saying at times that he did not feel parents really cared or that they were avoiding an issue. Studies conducted by Galinsky (1988), Powell, (1989) have confirmed that educators often feel that the work that they do is not understood or valued by families. Indeed the session was aborted as

one family canceled before the meeting and I agreed to make a home visit to bring them up-to-date and the other parent simply did not show. Tension began to build and there was no point in the educators remaining. They both had other commitments elsewhere. Their body language showed concern and Jake mentioned that he was not surprised. He did not wish to judge others but there always seemed to be something to get in the way of follow through. He believes in parent involvement but sometimes it is just so difficult. Again there was that tone in his voice. Was there another message being conveyed? When will they see my work as valuable? Do they really care?

As we faced delays caused by the non-attendance of the families at the parent-educator session Jake began to lose his motivation, "...knowing that...the biting incident...And when he was asked to leave... the delays and during these three, four more weeks of uncertainty. The lack of interest by the parents. It seemed that both Anna and I lost our enthusiasm" (journal, 20/07/96). As Jake spoke there was almost a feeling of not understanding 'why the parents didn't care.' It was not spoken but his body language reflected this sense of frustration.

Jake considers himself to be a committed educator. He enjoys his work with the children and considers it a vocation not just a job. He attends conferences and in the process of reflection has realized that although the research study was aborted it did help him in his personal journey towards

professionalism. He has successfully completed his early childhood studies and continues to believe that his professional journey continues. "...thinking back and remembering the enthusiasm and the excitement I had and not being able to follow through...unconsciously led me to accept a position on the Board of Directors of a professional Early Childhood Association" (journal, 20/07/96). He has also started to make some home visits to families. He believes this may help the partnership as both parties can see each other in different settings.

### 4.3 ANNA'S TALE:

It is now time to introduce the reader to Anna. I ask the reader to join us at the park behind the center. It is early afternoon and the sun is shining with a warm summer breeze. There are older children playing in the distance at the far edge of the park and a cyclist passes along the cycling path. The scene is one of tranquillity. This is the story of Anna as told by myself. Listen as her tale unfolds. Her story has some similarities to the story of Jake but it also includes information from our audio taped interview. Anna is a very open and dynamic individual. She too sees herself as a dedicated early childhood educator. To her providing care and education for young children is not just a job. She has been involved in working with young children for several years. She is a parent of two girls who are now beyond the early childhood years but her original beginnings in the field was as a duty mother in her children's preschool. She became involved in the co-op parent board and began to care for children as a home care provider. One of her friends was working at the center and mentioned that the director was looking to hire a French speaking educator 'specialist'; she decided to apply. Together



they were encouraged to enroll in courses at a CEGEP college. In our interview she recalled how she had been affected by Magda Gerber's philosophy of educating. She had struggled with her teaching style and made so many changes that year. Anna had graduated and she found that she was missing the opportunity to dialogue with others. She recollected that when I proposed my study she was eager to participate. Even at the beginning of the study she was very verbal about the importance of parent-educator communication and working together for the child. As a single parent herself she commented that it was not always easy and that support systems were important. Throughout the period of the study there were moments when she would return to the issue of communication and catch herself if she seemed to be judgmental.

Anna was very involved in working toward having families sign up for the project. She took on the responsibility of tracking the forms and tried to communicate with the various parents. She too, however, found the process very slow and soon was expressing her sense of frustration. She felt that she was letting me down whenever I called to pick up forms or check on how we were progressing. We discussed some possible strategies that might work and together we came up with ideas. She was very open to suggestions and generally kept an open mind. She would say let me try again to speak to so and so... At times parents seemed to be so busy they just ran in and out of the center. Anna remained steadfast, was organized and made many attempts to communicate with parents about the research but like Jake she found that at times she did not feel valued by the parents. She found it difficult to communicate when they were on different schedules

from the parents. Anna had a system however for regular communication regarding the children's day. She talked about using a daily form and having parents understand the importance of staying in touch, 'letting us know about things that occur outside the daycare so that we can work together'.

At the educator pre-session Anna showed her openness and ability to communicate. She quickly articulated her needs and asked for clarification on any points that were not clear to her. She feels strongly about the importance of building trust and respect, 'getting off to a good start'. When we were reviewing the names of the two families who had agreed to participate in the study she registered surprise that one particular family had volunteered. Indeed when the parent did not show up for the meeting she commented "she has not shown up for parent-educator night. We waited but she cancelled at the last minute too" (notes, 08/05/96). Her body language showed disappointment. As she left with Jake they both seemed to feel that they once again had been let down. Were they really saying are we not important enough for you to come to talk together? At the time I remember feeling that there was an edge in her voice. Was this an indicator and should I have been more perceptive to recognize that we may experience problems? I have returned to these notes so many times in my reflections of what had occurred.

When we kept trying to continue the project and when I had posted the new revised information sheet it was Anna who kept pointing it out to parents but

one day when we spoke she finally indicated her frustration and suggested that I try to push the director to be more involved. She seemed to be feeling overwhelmed. I felt the frustration in her unspoken words as she hinted at feeling let down on other occasions and lacking support. She mentioned the need for more consistent communication. She realized that the model that the daycare used was not effective. In reality she was confirming that effective communication was not an asset of the director. The element of time was involved. This is a common thread throughout the stories. Each participant kept indicating that communication takes time. It takes time to build trust; it doesn't just happen but everyone seemed to be short of time. However Anna's reflections were beginning to show that the parents were not responding because they did not feel secure. The partnerships in these cases was not as strong as first perceived. They were also feeling frightened of being perceived differently from other families.

During our interview Anna continued to recall her experiences and related how she felt about partnerships. We had the opportunity to reflect together on what happened and what we learned. Some key words were 'time', 'communicating', 'working together'. She recalled that they had left the parent consent forms in their mailboxes and that Jake and herself thought that the families had already talked with me and that they knew that they needed to sign them. She remembered feeling excited because "...you had made a good presentation...you talked with them...it was well explained so I figured, 'Wow! That's great. We're going to have all those forms back, I know it. Not like collecting forms for a field trip.'" She reflected and suggested that in hindsight she should have made "a list of parent names



and had them sign that they had received the forms. This would help us keep track of who had not responded... It's difficult as you think of these things afterwards...it's important for us too...to make them aware...this is happening...It was frustrating when we wanted to conduct this research and...I think maybe they didn't fully understand what was going to happen...they were reluctant to participate in the videotaping...they don't understand the importance of it". She reflected and suggested that maybe if we had insisted that the parents respond 'yes .. no.. want more information...give a reason why they did not wish to participate.. we would have been able to regroup more quickly.' It was interesting that she too was also thinking that perhaps we should have been more strict with families. Luc had also realized that he had not been direct enough. Anna thought my idea of a video clip of me talking about the research project might have helped as they could have used it at the center on parent night or even taken a copy home to view and return.

As Anna talked and relived the experiences, her tone of voice changed; there was a strength ... you could feel that what she felt came from the heart not just from reading about it in her textbooks. Anna truly believes that all toddlers should receive respect and quality care whether they are rich or poor. She believes in the importance of working together with families. Communication is important. She worries about the families who do not communicate. "These are the ones whom we need to reach. We need to model for children. I want parents to realize that how we communicate affects the children. They watch us." Anna's voice showed concern because these parents who had not carried through in the research study had also

cancelled or not attended the fall session for parents but she seemed to be unaware of how families in disadvantaged situations may need extra support or different ways of approach. Pence and Canning (1987) demonstrated that educators need to understand the changing roles, family needs, family structures and societal changes that are occurring in order to provide support for families. She became very animated and at times she coughed and excused herself. She had just recovered from being quite ill. Anna believes that it is important to start off on a strong footing in order for the partnership to succeed.

Anna communicates with families and builds partnerships through regular daily verbal communication. It happens at 'drop-off' and 'pick-up' times but educator shifts vary. "...in the morning and at night...seldom that we will see a parent picking up their child and not spending a few minutes with us and talking...but doesn't seem to be sufficient time to talk. There are the other children to watch over as well." There seemed to be frustration in her voice. What Anna was saying was similar to Endsley, Minsh and Zhou's (1993) findings regarding parent-educator communications. To help relieve this problem, a daily communication form on each child is kept and at the beginning parents are encouraged to check it. They are encouraged to talk to the educator about their child. "Ask questions and be really interested in finding out about what is going on in that child's life outside the center." She did not realize that parents may be frightened to share information for fear that they may be perceived as not adequate in their parenting roles. In addition families in 'relative poverty', that is, not having sufficient money left over to enjoy a lifestyle that is considered normal or 'average', may feel that

they are being judged. Families are encouraged to stay or to drop in during the day. Anna then explained how she handles problems with parents. She related how she helped a mother realize the importance of letting the staff and her child know when she was just dropping in. This came about as a mother, who studies at home, was popping in with an item that she forgot, staying a few seconds and then never saying anything to the child. The child became so upset that she cried for almost an hour and couldn't nap. Anna thought it was cultural. "...you know sometimes it is cultural in the sense that the parent was telling me at the beginning that 'My daughter doesn't cry...she's okay...she's okay...with strangers'. I had to respect the family's culture but it was important to help her understand what would help her daughter. They need to see us working together. We need to trust each other. Anna paused and then after a moment she looked surprised. It was almost like she had just discovered something for the first time. She shared the idea that "maybe the parent was checking up on us". She had never considered that before.

Every fall Anna explained that the team prepares for a get-together. They promote it as a sharing information night. It is here that the team sets the groundwork for building a trusting relationship. "by telling parents what we are going to do Sometimes it depends on how important it is to have their trust already. But how are we going to build it? We need to really be careful at the beginning of the year to build that trust and how important it is...so that they will trust us too with their children and communicating builds that trust...You are really asking them to trust you....'Blind trust'...need to put it into action." At the meeting they explain the principles that they follow in



caring for the children. She laughed and said it was important to help parents feel that they are the experts because so often they are inhibited. She achieves this through using examples and explicitly telling them that they know their child best. "You're the pros...you know your child better than anyone. I hope to know your child better...but really I rely on you to let me know about...child's personality. I will find out some of it'. Parents feel better, so they feel well you're together..." The team responds to questions by getting parents to share their ideas. Anna eagerly shared an example of how she helped parents understand the importance of helping toddlers problem-solve and gain independence. She related the following story.

*"Last year when we were at the shopping center one of the children just fell down...flat on her face. And this big man, about six-foot-two, came from behind, picked up the child and back on her feet...bye. The child never knew what happened first, never even had time to experience what she is feeling... Is she hurt? Is she embarrassed? ... she's not even sure yet and all of a sudden magically she's back on her feet...'What's happened?'... I explain to parents the importance of a child getting up themselves."*

Anna uses examples such as this one to help parents understand and develop parenting skills but she emphasized that they are always made to feel equal. Near the end of the interview, she expressed her disappointment that the project did not proceed. She wondered aloud why parents were hesitant to participate. They seemed frightened to sign up. She felt that she had let me down. Even then she seemed tired and discouraged but she talked about her new job and responsibilities. She was planning to use more home visits and to really work towards establishing a foundation of trust between herself and the parents in the preschool where she was going to

work. Home visits before the children start at the preschool would give her an opportunity to view the child in another setting where they were comfortable. She felt that she had learned from this experience. She was thinking about how time and the outside forces affect each one of us and consequently the children with whom we interact. When the research study was cancelled, she had joined the board of a professional association and had begun to move on with her professional life. Anna had much to offer and from sitting with her and listening to her relive her experiences I found myself learning about communication and partnerships. It also helped me rethink the events of the past three months.

It is now time to summarize the results of the retelling of these 'tales'. First it was found that each of the participants identified 'time' or lack-of-it to be a barrier to conducting the study. Time seemed to interfere with the building of effective communication as families were caught in the 'hurried family syndrome'. Luc, the director, was also unable to offer the support he had wished to give due to his multiple responsibilities. As stated earlier effective communication was also not one of his strong assets. He has difficulty with following through on issues. In addition the communication systems that were in place did not always work as they were based on a traditional model and did not consider what would be comfortable for families. Families did not really participate in the decisions as to when and how communication would occur. Families' perceptions of the importance of communicating and those of the director and educators may have been different. Participants discovered that families were frightened or hesitant to sign up. This fear seemed to have been caused by a feeling that they would be on the 'hot



seat'. In other words, they would be put on the spot and would be revealing some very personal information. This would make them more vulnerable. As pointed out earlier the daycare center is located in a fairly middle class suburban municipality. Although there are families in special circumstances they are in the minority. The realities of their lives interfered with their ability to participate. When you are worrying about keeping your job so that you can pay for food and clothing or lead what is considered to be a 'normal' or 'average' lifestyle signing up for a study is not a priority. Families may have felt that their children would be treated differently by other families in the center. Although the consent forms did not state that only families in disadvantaged situations were participating all information had been shared with them. They also knew that the parent board of the center were aware of the boundaries of the participants. There was a growing realization that the concept of parent involvement and how it is perceived by educators and the parents themselves needed to be reviewed. Finally there were too many limitations for eligibility to participate. The population within this select age group was not sufficient and were in the minority.

It seems reasonable to suggest that future research needs to be done on the subject of parent involvement and forms of communication used with parents in disadvantaged settings. It is important to involve parents in this study to identify their perceptions. Powell (1989) and Endsley, Minish and Zhou (1993) have studied parent-teacher communications in privately owned centers in the United States but the issue of time needs to be explored further so that effective communication systems can be implemented. Research studies that include intervention and that are based



on methods that help parents feel equal are needed. Teacher training programs need to include concrete planning and interacting with parents in the fieldwork period. A study could be planned around the 'lived experiences' of these students using reflective analysis.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Researcher's Tale

In this chapter I will relate the researcher's 'tale'. The first section of the chapter recalls the beginnings of the study; the second part relates my recall of the events including my feelings; then moves onto my conversations with the parents and my reflections of the interviews that were arranged with the director and one of the educators. Throughout the chapter links are made to the research literature. At the end of the chapter a summary of the findings including my interpretations of events and issues for future research are presented.

When I began the research study I wished to gain a deeper understanding of parent-educator partnerships in a daycare setting with disadvantaged toddlers. Although I was not successful in conducting the research as planned I have learned about partnerships in the process. My interactions with Luc, Jake, Anna and the parents, who did show interest in the study have given me insight into the forces at play when attempting to conduct qualitative research. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) refer to qualitative research as being messy. I ask the reader to join me as I recall the problems in my personal journey to gather qualitative research data.

I too live in the suburban municipality where the daycare center is located. I am part of the dominant middle class anglophone population. I have raised my family in this social context but have also attempted to understand the various forces that have an impact on all of us on a daily basis. Respect and acceptance of each person as worthy human beings have formed part of my daily values system. The child care field has played an important role in my life. I cannot truly remember a time when I was not involved in some manner with children and their families. My eighty year old mother recently said that she could not see a time in life when she would not be fascinated with observing young children at play. This is how I was raised. Whether working or traveling I am eager to explore the types of care that children are receiving. For me child care is a vocation, a calling; it is not something that you turn on or off. As mentioned in the introduction these values have even led me to participate in training programs for Native and Inuit educators in child care settings. Join me now as I reflect on the troubles that I encountered while attempting to conduct my study on partnerships in daycare settings with disadvantaged toddlers.

I began the research study feeling confident that suitable centers and subjects would be available. My initial contacts were encouraging. In the summer of 1995, three agencies indicated their interest in participating in the project; they thought the criteria suitable. I was encouraged as these agencies were all 'parent-controlled' and fostered parent involvement. Although located in a middle income neighborhood, they provided services for families from varied socio-economic backgrounds. In other words, they had low income, welfare assisted, single-parent to high socio-economic



level, two parent, dual wage-earner families enrolled. Cloutier, Champoux, Jacques and Marcotte (1994) found that quality of care provided to families appeared to be significantly better in advantaged areas. In addition parents generally are more actively involved in day care committees in advantaged areas. This was not to say that parents in disadvantaged situations were not interested in their children. Reality proved that field research is indeed messy and is not easy. By January 1996 two of these agencies discovered that they would not be able to join the study. One agency explained that they no longer had the families who met the criteria and the other agency indicated that they would not be able to meet the time commitment. Both parents and educators were too tired from their daily lives. The third agency was still interested but I was now faced with searching for other possible sites. I remember beginning to experience a sense of panic. I was not being successful and I too was short of time. My work and other life responsibilities were calling me. Discussions with colleagues helped me put things into perspective. I was now entering a new phase in qualitative research that is, the 'reality phase'. Colleagues assured me that this was normal. They suggested that I change my focus and simplify my topic. My advisor had agreed that what I was setting out to do was manageable but complex. It would require commitment and a tremendous amount of time to complete but he had faith in my ability. In my naiveté I remained steadfast and decided to follow my set course. My pathway in life has never been the simplest route but rather it is always the complicated one. If only I had listened to those who had gone before me! By the end of February 1996 it became evident that I would need to adapt the study or risk the possibility of losing the one agency which was ready to participate. I was beginning to live the realities of an ecological approach. Bronfenbrenner (1979) points

out that the different systems interact and are embedded in each other. In my case family responsibilities and work commitment were beginning to pull me away from my research. I needed to return to the North to deliver a training course. I decided it was time to stop, to reflect and to regroup. My decision was wise. I revamped my target dates; reviewed my research proposal; modified the time frame for the study and realized that if I used one agency that it would represent one case which would not change the purpose of my research. I contacted my advisor for permission to make the changes. I finalized the written overview for the study and discussed it with Luc. My batteries were re-energized. I remember feeling like the rabbit in the television commercial. I could keep going forever. I boarded the airplane for my teaching assignment in Northern Quebec feeling that I was back on course. The research project would begin soon. When I returned in mid-March, the agency's parent board had confirmed the daycare's participation in the project. We began the process of signing up participants. Two educators, Anna and Jake volunteered as did Luc, the director. The long journey to find suitable and willing families began. I was eager to talk to the families in the toddler group but Luc thought that they might be inhibited. He needed time to approach them and to familiarize them with the study. I respected his judgment and realized that confidentiality was important. Upon reflection I realize that this was a mistake as I was not directly involved initially with explaining the research study. I did not begin to gain their trust or to help them feel comfortable with me. Given the context of their lives it may have made a difference but then they may not have had time. They became frightened to sign the consent form because they had no idea of who I was as a person or what I really wished to do. The frustration began



as one day seemed to stretch into another. March stretched into April. I seemed to be in contact with Luc on a regular basis.

*Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup>: "spoke to Luc today between classes but he hasn't managed to reach the family....Monday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>: time is marching forward and still no commitment from families.... They are saying yes but ... no word... anxiety is beginning to build...feelings of frustration.. I hate this waiting game.. I need to be directly involved..." April 24 ... still no forms but contact made (personal journals).*

It was about this time that Luc realized that there were only three families who fit within the criteria of the study. He said that it was unusual and that some of the families whom he originally thought would be interested had left the center or their status had changed. This seems to occur frequently in childcare situations as the other agencies had also indicated that families moved, left the center. Could it be tied to the other factors at play in these people's lives? Their 'microsystems' overlapping? This is reflected in the following description of events.

Finally April 28<sup>th</sup> direct contact was established with participants. I remember feeling relief that I had finally achieved one of my goals. I had spoken to two families who both agreed to participate. One of these families had been receiving financial aid and the other family was headed by a single mother. The single parent worked in an office. The first family had two parents sharing in the childrearing. The mother was studying and had just found a minimum wage sales job. They seemed interested and expressed



the importance of needing to be flexible in meeting times. One family said that Saturday morning might be the best time for them. When I suggested that I make home visits, they sounded surprised that I wanted to fit my schedule to theirs and that they were to be involved in the framework of the sessions. When I analyzed the situation I remember thinking should I have been more perceptive and realized that these people perhaps were not familiar with being treated as equals? I wished to approach the sessions from a 'strengths model' as suggested by Galinsky (1992) and Workman and Gage (1994). It was important to me that my initial contacts helped them to feel capable, comfortable with me and I realized that trust takes time. Consent forms to participate in the project were ready and it was agreed by all the participants that they would sign them at the daycare center. Anna, Jake and Luc were all willing to collect the forms for me. Everything was organized and I left the forms for signatures but nothing occurred. Anna, Jake, Luc and I all began to feel frustrated. Each of us was trying to complete our task of getting parent signatures but we seemed to be facing barriers. One parent kept forgetting or said that her husband was busy and couldn't sign. She couldn't sign without him. There seemed to be fear of some sort that she could not act alone. I tried to probe deeper but she seemed to become nervous when I suggested that perhaps she could sign and her husband could do so at a later date. I never communicated with the father but Anna mentioned that he didn't seem as sure about participating. Mother had also suggested that she didn't think that she would be eligible for subsidy anymore because she had a job. She seemed to be frightened that this might lead her into trouble. Friendly (1994) and Wilson (1997) refer to the effect that family situations have on their ability to cope. Ryerse (1994) mentions that mothers in disadvantaged circumstances often face

greater anxiety, depression and lack of social support networks. This family always seemed to cancel whenever there was some event at the daycare. Anna's voice showed disappointment possibly stemming from previous encounters. We mutually agreed that they could sign when they attended the parent-educator session as this seemed to be more convenient for them. I began to sense that we were in 'troubled waters'. Outside forces affected this family's ability to follow through on commitments. They played a real role in the family not signing the consent form. Mother had shared her frustrations regarding taking courses, juggling work schedules with her husband's work schedule. She said it just seemed impossible sometimes to keep everything together. She had quit attending her classes because she needed her current job. She didn't have sitters. Her boss had promised to give her a schedule but did not or could not keep the same schedule for her. There was tension in her voice as she talked. There seemed to be genuine concern about her daughter's life at the daycare but time was again a problem (notes, telephone conversation, 29/04/96). The mother was almost frightened of being in the 'hot seat' This fear of getting involved was confirmed by Shimoni and Baxter (1996) and Wilson (1997). The situation that presented itself was that these families felt that if they participated they would become more vulnerable and that their child would be treated differently than the others in the group. At one point she inquired if anyone else had signed up.

What a contrast in personalities! The second family, a single parent, whose son was in the toddler group, was very open and talked openly about how she wanted to participate. She found that Anna and Jake had been very approachable and were always communicating with her about his day. She



talked about the importance to her of letting them know how things went at home of 'being connected'. These communications tended to occur quickly and generally upon arrival at the center. Endsley, Minish and Zhou (1993) also mention that these informal communication times form a large part of the partnership-building in day care settings. She openly told me that she had recently separated and how difficult it was for her and her son. She and her "ex" were trying to remain civil towards each other for their son's sake. When I finished our conversation I was hopeful. I remember leaving with my family for the week-end feeling a sense of relief. Things were going to proceed as planned. If I could get just one family to sign then the other family might feel comfortable. However the following week we spoke on the telephone; she had not shown up for a scheduled meeting with me. Evidently there had been some difficulties at the daycare. Her son had been experiencing some anxiety and had started to hurt other children. She apologized for not calling me to cancel but work was busy and she was distracted. Reflecting about the experience I realized that this was an example of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems at work. In Bronfenbrenner's ecological model systems are embedded in and interact with each other. The daycare is an example of a formal system within a family's social context. The 'mesosystem', the daycare, can have a significant impact on how parents interact with their children. At the same time as formal communication systems at the daycare are interacting with a family system there are other informal systems at work. An example would include social relationships with family, friends and/or colleagues. Here is an example of how a parent in need of a social network was not feeling that she had a social network available to offer her support in coping with her daily life. I felt the tension in her voice. There was anxiety. I sensed that she



needed to talk and to have someone listen. I tried to be patient and not to show my own disappointment at having rearranged my schedule to accommodate her and then be left waiting. I kept reminding myself not to be judgmental. She said that she would sign the consent form the next day but that she was a little worried about what was going to happen. She wanted to participate; she thought that the sessions might help her find ways to cope with the stresses in her life at the moment. I too was feeling anxious about whether the project was in jeopardy (notes, 02/05/96).

I recall having an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach that week. We had established that the first parent-educator session would take place at the daycare on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Just prior to the session I remember feeling both excited and nervous. The adrenalin was flowing. We were finally going to meet and make contact as a group. We would begin the dialogue and the sharing. I prepared for the educator pre-session and the parent-educator session as they were to occur back-to-back. I planned, checked and rechecked my materials, rehearsed how I would start the session and made certain that Luc had not forgotten to make arrangements for the space and extra staff. I wanted to be organized, certain about what we were about to do but not be directive. It is often more difficult to let the conversation flow; not to be in control when trust has not been established. There was so much to orchestrate. I felt like a conductor who needs to know all of the parts and know exactly when to pause and when to bring in the wind instruments, the strings, etc. The timing needs to be perfect. I thought about my planning for teaching. I plan but then in practice I adjust to the adults and recognize that adults need to be actively involved. Bredekamp (1987) and Jones (1986,

1993) were useful. I remember recalling Workman and Gage's (1994) 'family strengths' approach. It was important that all participants come together as equals. I did not wish to be perceived as the expert. All participants needed to feel comfortable, respected and empowered. Stevens, Hough and Nurss (1993) have pointed out that educator-family partnerships often conceptualize parent involvement differently. I wanted to help parents feel that they were able to make decisions about their children rather than remedy deficiencies. I arrived early for the meeting only to hear from Luc that one of the families had canceled. They wished to participate but would need to reschedule. I was feeling frustrated, my stomach was in knots, but I knew that I needed to remain professional and conduct the session. I was already reviewing in my mind how I could make a home visit. What other strategies could I employ to get them to carry through? Later, when rereading my notes, it became clear to me that I should have been more firm. I should have insisted that they decide whether their participation was important to them. Time constraints should have been enforced. Perhaps I could have found a way to help them better understand the importance of research. At the pre-session both Anna and Jake seemed upset that the family had canceled. They seemed to feel that this was not a new situation. There was discussion that the mother and father did not seem to agree. Father still seemed to be hesitant to participate. The realities of this family's life was again presenting a barrier. The educators felt that their work was not valued by the parents. The balance of the session was spent talking about the study; identifying what we would cover in the upcoming parent-educator session. Anna asked for clarification of roles while Jake expressed his concern about speaking in groups and being videotaped. We spoke about our fears and how we can learn from videotaping, writing



about our daily practice and the importance of research. This session was refreshing. We seemed to fit. The atmosphere was relaxed and the conversation flowed back and forth between us. Jake and Anna both indicated that they felt it was important to involve families in their child's experiences but the reality was that they did not realize the impact that informal family systems could have on parents interactions at the center. Their concept of parent involvement was based on a traditional model in place at the center. The system did not involve parents in mutual decision making but rather was based on the old concept that parents should be involved in field trips, etc. They should want to and be participating actively in the classroom setting. The educators had knowledge to share to help parents learn to parent. It helped them understand the child better. They were looking forward to this opportunity to work more closely with these families. However the mood changed as we waited for the other parent to arrive for the parent-educator session. At first the atmosphere was sympathetic. "...traffic, maybe detained... you know she arrived by taxi this morning and seemed distracted.. something about car trouble" (notes, 08/05/96). As the time passed both Anna and Jake's body language showed tension. It was then that there was some mention about the son of this parent having some difficulties adapting. They spoke about having tried to support the family but they didn't know whether things would work out. They seemed to feel that their efforts were not valued. "We can't spend all the time just with her son when there are other children to take care of as well." Both educators tried not to be judgmental but there seemed to be some buried feelings. It was reflective of Ryan's (1971) idea of 'blaming the victim'. There was even perhaps a hint of "what can we expect from this parent". Later I began to realize that there was a link to not feeling valued by



the parents for the work that they do. We agreed that there was no point for Jake and Anna to remain as they both had other commitments. I waited but also finally left a message for the parent to call me later at home. It was no longer possible to meet at the day care because the center would be closing. The aborted parent-educator session left me feeling frustrated. I experienced a range of emotions. I felt disappointed, let down, sad, angry, insecure and defeated. As I drove home I tried to detach myself. I needed to think about the situation; hear from the parent and then assess the situation, learn from the experience and move forward. I remember thinking about the research literature and saying to myself "yes... this is happening..."

The following is my reflection of the events that occurred during my conversation with the parent. The notes that were taken just after the telephone conversation formed the basis for developing this section.

Later that evening I heard from the parent. She called to apologize and explain. Her tone of voice was excited. There was tension, stress. She kept repeating that "... she was sorry; she should have called when she realized that she couldn't make it... I couldn't even get someone to pick up my son... I don't know ...recently everything is so difficult." (notes, 08/05/96). It was then that I realized that she was feeling unable to cope. She did not have the necessary family or social support systems that she required. Studies such as, Anglin and Glossop (1987) have referred to the informal systems that interact with formal systems in an ecological model. Frequently families in disadvantaged situations lack these same support systems. She needed someone to listen; not to judge. Her voice was shaky as she related the past days experiences and how her son was biting other children. He was also beginning to act out at home. The day care had been supportive and they

were trying to work together. She felt that the center was doing "what they can ... but my son may need to leave.... They can't provide a shadow all the time.. it's too expensive." There almost seemed to be another message as well... "What do they expect me to do? Are they watching him enough?" It came to me in the data analysis that what she was expressing had an impact on partnerships. On the one hand she was feeling judged by the daycare and coming up short as a parent. On the other hand she was feeling that her child was not receiving the care and attention that she would give if she were available. The way the individual perceives the environment has an impact on the enterprise. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The relationship between herself and the educators was not as secure as I had originally understood. She perceived that she was not living up to her parenting responsibilities. Galinsky (1988) had found that parents often feel inferior and that tensions of this nature affect the partnership. She was worried that if she didn't have child care then she might loose her job. This would in turn affect her ability to provide for her child. Fear can be a powerful barrier to communication and the building of trust. At times her voice was close to tears. She sounded scared, worried, frustrated and discouraged. She mentioned that she had a little support from her church group but that it was difficult when alone. My troubles collecting data at that moment seemed secondary; I needed to suppress my own emotions and to reach out ; to listen and to offer support. Later in analyzing what had occurred it first seemed that I had acted intuitively but then the link became apparent to me. The behavior that this mother had shown was not abnormal. Her actions were confirmation of Anglin & Glossop (1987). They found that families whose support networks are weak or almost non-existent are more at risk of giving into the stresses and strains that can escalate without such support



(p.179). I thought about Bronfenbrenner (1979), Pence (1988) and Powell (1989) who had all pointed out that there are many systems that overlap and affect the child and their family at the center. These 'microsystems' were affecting this parent's ability to cope with the situation at the center. Afterwards I thought that at the end of our conversation there was almost a feeling of denial "... Well maybe I'll pull him out anyway ... if he's not happy". When we ended the conversation she seemed calm and thanked me for just listening. There was sincerity in her voice but I realized then that she had felt that I could not truly understand her situation as I sat in my comfortable middle class kitchen listening to her. I thought about the situation and hoped that there was a way that this family would remain in the study. Partnership building at the day care might provide the support systems that she needed.

Unfortunately the study faced problems once again. The single parent did need to find an alternate arrangement for her child but the daycare worked with her to receive professional help and the parent expressed that the center had done what they could but there was a defeated tone in her voice. Anna, Jake, Luc and I regrouped. As a result I decided to adapt the study one more time. I would increase the field observations/videotaping sessions. Jake agreed to participate as well although he was still a little nervous about being videotaped. Parents would be free to be involved in just the videotaping or they could also attend a session. Time seemed to be a factor in families not volunteering. I posted a sign on the toddler classroom door with very specific details and time limitations. Anna and Jake also briefed parents but I still did not have direct contact with parents



to explain or discuss what would occur. The parents would only contact me if they were still interested. The response brought only two leads who agreed to the videotaping. Our telephone conversations revealed that these families were still a little hesitant. They would also be taking vacations and be absent from the center at times. The realities of their lives was keeping them from making a commitment. Time was running out; it was now mid-May. Motivation was at a low ebb. If I videotaped two parents then what would happen when the other families entered the room? It seemed to be a problem that couldn't be solved. Luc then informed me that vacation time was approaching. Some of the toddlers would be moving up. This meant that there would be different educators with these families and there would be replacement staff at the center. Anna announced that she would be leaving the center for a new position in August. The aborted parent-educator session became an aborted research study. Time had run out. Everyone felt drained, disappointed and discouraged. We had tried but at this point it was time to accept defeat. I began the process of thinking about what went wrong. Luc, Anna and Jake agreed to reflect on their experiences and to share their stories. The only journal entries kept were my own. After speaking with my advisor it was agreed that I had sufficient data to write about the troubles we had encountered over the past three months. Anna and Luc agreed to be interviewed separately while Jake agreed to write about his feelings and experiences. He did not feel comfortable to talk and to be taped.

My reflections of these interviews are what follows. Initially I prepared for the interviews with renewed interest. Through coming together and recalling

our lived experiences I hoped that we could gain greater insight. We would now be able to gain some understanding of the events that had occurred.

The reader has already been introduced to Luc and the setting in which the interview occurred in Chapter four. When I arrived at the center Luc was busy. He greeted me as though he had forgotten about our arranged interview. Throughout the discussion there were interruptions which seemed to make it difficult for him to remain focused. The energy in the room had tension that made me feel the need to rush. He started over a few times. He seemed to be occupied with other thoughts but when I asked if it would be better that we reschedule he indicated that ... "no ... there's always some other pressing problem". The recalling of events however was helpful. As we spoke I listened but at times probed more deeply and through this process began to reflect on some of the events. It became more clear to me that if we had introduced the study to parents through other ways, such as, videotapes they may have felt more comfortable. but the reality of their busy lives would have remained. I shared this idea with him and together we explored it's possibilities. A short video clip of myself explaining the study and introducing myself as a parent and grandparent may have helped families begin to know me as an individual and not as an 'expert' or stranger. Luc could have added something about how the research could help the center in providing quality care. It became clear that I should have taken a more active role in sharing the information about the project with prospective participants. As we progressed through the events Luc referred to the importance of research. He felt badly that he had not been as supportive but mentioned again that ".... There's never sufficient time to

touch base". Communication was also a problem. What Luc was actually saying was that he realizes that he initiates communication but does not follow through. The families did not feel comfortable and were even feeling vulnerable as their trust was not as developed as originally perceived. We also had not considered that the social context in which the center is located would have an impact on disadvantaged families being willing to be identified within the center. Confidentiality was protected but the parents may have thought that other families would realize that not everyone was participating.

The interview with Anna was very relaxed. Perhaps the location helped as we sat in the park with no one else around us surrounded by sun, a warm breeze and small green rolling hills. We were removed from the bustle of the daycare. The interview became more like a conversation as Anna recalled her experiences. She became quite animated at times. When I began the analysis later I realized that Anna was very clearly stating that it is important to open those lines of communication with parents but she too did not realize the effect that parents lives have on their interactions at the center. Although Luc also feels it's importance, the extra constraints that he faces as a director, affects his ability to carry through. Anna was also ready to take some of the responsibility for the study being aborted. Time was a major theme for her. She was thinking about what had occurred and already planning what she would change in her partnership building in her new position as coordinator/teacher in a pre-school. Anna's honesty and insight helped me to understand that in training early childhood students in educator preparation programs students need to identify their values;



understand how they feel about families. They can then begin to develop their concept of parent involvement and learn about communication. Only then can students develop strategies to build partnerships.

The arduous task of transcribing audio tapes and piecing together the events that occurred began. Through reading my notes and few journal entries, highlighting key words, phrases and statements it became apparent that the themes that emerged from all of our stories were time, communication, fear of research, of the unknown or hesitancy to become involved, to be put on the 'hot seat'. From the variety of data collected there was information on partnerships. Through the process of reflective analysis it was possible to see links to the research literature. Participants feedback on their stories kept the dialogue going and helped in my analysis.

My personal journey of reflections has come to an end but before moving on to draw final conclusions about the study it is important to summarize the events and to make suggestions for future research. The interviews, conversations yielded some interesting insights into the lived experiences of participants and the process of partnership-building. I found that the organization of the study was sound but the time frame to complete the study needed to be more clearly defined. It was not realistic. When I realized that there was a problem with getting volunteers I should have acted more swiftly to adapt the study and to search further afield. The social context should have been considered and ways found to circumvent the fears of stigma. This center is located in a predominantly middle class municipality. In terms of causes for the parents not signing the consent



forms the main finding was that they were frightened. There was reference to 'who else is participating?' 'I need to speak to my husband.' This may have been caused by the 'hot seat' effect or in other words being 'put on-the-spot'. They would have revealed some very personal information. The lack of participation came not from a flaw in the research model but rather that these families' outside informal 'microsystems' may have interfered. There was evidence of avoidance of dealing with problems. The educators and parents perceptions of partnerships seemed to be different. The trust that initially seemed to be present was not as strong when a problem developed. The implications for research is that we need to train educators to be prepared to find ways that help parents understand the importance of working together and to build trust.

## CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter is divided into four sections: 1) a restatement of the problem; 2) a summary of the problems or barriers to conducting the study; 3) some advice to researchers who wish to develop similar research on new partnerships and 4) Some advice to teachers in daycare training programs.

### THE PROBLEM:

The original problem as outlined in chapter one was concerned with partnership building (ongoing communication) between families in disadvantaged situations and educators and it's possible impact on the quality of care given as perceived by families and educators in toddler day care settings. In reality the study is on the troubles of a neophyte researcher in getting qualitative research on partnerships in a day care setting with disadvantaged toddlers. The main objective of the study was not to prove any theory but to gain a deeper understanding of parent-educator partnerships and to examine sources of conflict and tension as perceived by families in disadvantaged situations and the educators in toddler day care settings. The study was set in an ecological framework. That is, child care was considered to be a comprehensive service. Partnerships involved 'microsystems' that interacted or were embedded one in the other. A secondary goal was to improve understanding of how training programs might use information to better prepare educators to build partnerships. A combination of approaches, case and narrative of inquiry, within a qualitative paradigm were employed.



Whether toddlers should even be in daycare settings was not the issue. Researchers have differing viewpoints. However the research findings have consistently proven that the quality of care given does have an impact on the child's development. Some of these results have been discussed in chapters one and two already. The changes in family structures and concurrently the changes in the roles of men and women in society have increased the need for supplemental child rearing services. Women are increasingly returning to the paid labour force shortly after the birth of their children. Demographic trends in Canada also show an increase in single-parent, mother led households. Poverty has increased. It is a well documented fact that families in poverty face multiple problems of social adaptation difficulties. According to the research literature there are two main ways to look at poverty. They are: 'absolute poverty' and 'relative poverty'. Both of these perspectives have been explained in previous chapters. Whichever point of view you take regarding poverty, these families need support systems, such as daycare for their toddlers. Educators in daycare situations are being expected to fulfill expanding roles but they are not always receiving the necessary training and often the support needed to succeed. This led to the development of this study on partnerships.

Although the study did not proceed as planned a better understanding of the problems involved in partnerships in day care settings with disadvantaged toddlers did occur. Educators did manage to talk and reflect about partnerships when they relived experiences and talked about their practice. They did begin to realize the need for change in their perceptions of parent

involvement. Qualitative research indeed can be messy. Communication and the systems we use affect interactions in many ways.

## SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEMS:

As a result of reflection, transforming the data and retelling the narratives of Luc, Jake, Anna and myself, the researcher, barriers to conducting the study emerged. They were 'time', 'fear or hesitancy to become involved', communication barriers and possibly a difference in the perception of partnerships.

From the beginning of the study there seemed to be references to the element of time. It seemed to be a barrier to even managing to sign up participants. Each person talked about time and how there was "never enough time to do everything".

When I started to transform the data for analysis my first framing identified time as an important barrier. The "hurried child syndrome" could be a "hurried family syndrome" as Luc stated. (interview, July/96). Each of the narratives have several references to the element of time. Luc made note that he was always feeling pressured; Jake at first hesitated to join the study because he was not certain that he would have the time. He agreed because it was important to him. Anna also kept referring to the time it took to reach parents and being able to manage the time to 'touch base with each other'. Parents in their conversations said that it was difficult to manage work, family and taking older siblings to their events. They felt that

it was difficult to survive from day to day. I felt the urgency of time as we were delayed in beginning the study and my own personal time constraints related to my teaching and family responsibilities. We then faced the problem of the vacation period that was approaching. After my first approach to involve participants was not fruitful, I thought about the demands put on participants. Participants would need time to write in their journals, attend parent-educator sessions and the videotaping would also involve time. From my reflections, I developed a new plan of action. I introduced choice; I adjusted the number of sessions and the duration of them. but this still did not influence parents to sign up to participate. My knowledge construction was through the use of 'reflection-on-action'. In other words my actions were planned based on my thinking about what I had done. This was previously explained in chapter two in the literature review. It was only after the aborted study that I became aware of the fact that from a theoretical point of view we had failed to consider that the many 'microsystems' of all of the subjects were interacting and creating barriers. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that: " it becomes not only desirable but essential to take into account in every scientific inquiry about human behavior and development how the research situation was perceived and interpreted by the subjects of the study" (p. 30).

'Reflection' led me to the understanding that I should probe deeper to discover the reasons. In other words, 'why did parents not wish to participate?' Was it as simple as lack of time or were there other possible rationale? I sifted through the underlined words, phrases in the transcripts, notes and journals:- "reframing". It became clear that it was not just time that



was a barrier but something deeper was at the root of the problem. Their perception of the study's outcomes had an impact on their ability to participate. Their fear or hesitancy could be situated in outcomes of previous life experiences. Perhaps parents were afraid that they would become more vulnerable as they disclosed personal information during the study. This information may be reported and used against them in some manner.

My honesty in revealing the criteria for participation proved to be a major deterrent in getting parents to sign the consent forms. Although the consent forms did not state that participants were in a 'disadvantaged' situation; participants had received an overview of the study. They knew that the parent board had also agreed to the study being conducted. A fear of stigmatization may have lain at the root of the parents' hesitancy. They may have perceived that they would be treated differently by other families and that their children might be perceived differently. One can draw the conclusion that the social context played a major role in preventing families to sign the consent forms. The daycare was located in a predominantly middle class milieu. The families using the services represented a spectrum of trades people to professionals, however the majority of families were at the higher income bracket. These families in disadvantaged circumstances were in the minority. Anglin and Glossop (1987) have pointed out that our values, beliefs and judgments have an important impact on a study. In my data transformation I realized that my intentions were sound but perceptions can create barriers. I needed to find other ways to reveal the criteria for selection. Perhaps I should have chosen centres in 'disadvantaged areas' so that families would not have felt singled out. There may have been less

likelihood of being 'labeled'. An experienced researcher most probably would have changed the location as soon as he/she had discovered that there were only two or three families meeting the criteria or would have adapted the study immediately. If I had managed to get to know families at the daycare center prior to my introducing the study there would have been a more trusting relationship. I would have had direct contact from the initial stages of the study.

Effective communication presented another barrier. When beginning the study I had presented a detailed written overview of the study. In addition I communicated verbally with Luc to identify uncertainties and to clarify everything. Anna, Jake and Luc all communicated with me openly. I contacted them regularly to guarantee that everything was clear. However with regards to the possible parent participants communication was not as effective. My contact with the families came only after Luc had approached them and had given them a brief overview of the research. This was a mistake. Effective communication was not a strong asset of Luc's. He means well but does not always follow through with information. The written word is impersonal. Interpretation of the participants was not thoroughly checked by myself at the initial stage of the study. After recognizing that there was a problem I thought about the situation. It was then that I developed the idea of a short introductory video clip or attending a parent-educator night. It was too late to realize the first goal but there was a parent night planned. This provided an excellent opportunity to address the families directly and to clarify what we were attempting to do within the research study. Unfortunately the chain of communication did not function well. I received an answer too late to accomplish this plan of action. In his reflections Luc



recognized that the communication systems in place at the centre did not always work. This point was repeated by Anna (Anna's story, p.86). The importance of 'keeping in touch' and understanding the importance of keeping informed appeared to be perceived differently by parents and educators. One parent had said that she wanted to keep in touch but the educators needed to realize that there were other things to do (personal notes from parent conversation, 29/04/96). Luc had previously referred to these other 'microsystems' interfering. From a theoretical perspective the root of the problem lay in an insensitivity to the way that an ecological system functions. Anglin, Powell and Cochran (1987) show that sensitivity to treating subjects as participants and not as objects is an important aspect when conducting ecological research. There was a fundamental difference in the priority placed on daily communication. Anna had talked about daily communication forms and the need for parents to understand the importance of communication so that they could work together for the child. There was a system in place to 'inform' parents of this system but perhaps there needed to be more parent input in what systems would satisfy their perceived needs. The systems in place at the center were based on a traditional 'top-down' system. The forms of communication were decided by the center. The results were similar to Powell's (1989) findings and Endsley, Minnish and Zhou (1993). The daycare seemed to place more emphasis on communicating instructions to parents and telling them what the parents needed to do rather than encouraging parents to make decisions about what was important to communicate and when. This traditional system actually works against establishing partnerships because it does not empower parents. Anna was willing to take some of the responsibility for communication not being effective. She commented that "we need to model



for children. They watch us.." (interview, July '96). She had decided that in future she would also include home visits to enhance the communication and improve the building of partnerships. Jake had also provided feedback in his reflections on his story about the importance of home visits as it gave him a 'snapshot of the home environment.' They were beginning to realize that the external social systems affect interactions.

Anna's thinking about how she develops partnerships did provide some understanding of the original purpose for the study. Luc added that it was important to provide support for families. He considered the day care to be a 'HOME-AWAY-FROM-HOME' or an 'extended family'. This was proven when the child who was experiencing difficulties needed to be withdrawn. The day care did try to help the family and worked with them to find alternate child care arrangements and counseling services but the parent's perceptions of what occurred were clouded by the external forces in her life. Partnerships take time and commitment. This commitment includes financial backing in order to provide the support services. This would be at the 'macrosystem' level. Luc offered that perhaps we need to change our thinking about parent involvement. This was after he had listed how parents were encouraged to get involved on committees, field trips, fundraising, parent board and attending parent evenings. There seemed to be a growing realization that some parents may be perceiving involvement as being involved in bringing in their child and 'touching base'. They may not have the time or understanding of the other forms. Anna and Jake at the educator pre-session had indicated that the two participating families had not attended the parent nights and 'always have some reason to cancel'. Their

perceptions seemed to indicate that these parents didn't care about their children. There was also a hint that parents did not understand or perhaps value what they were doing for the child. This could be a barrier to developing the partnership. When I spoke with these families they showed that they cared but they seemed to be feeling overwhelmed by those other 'microsystems', such as work, siblings, etc. Upon closer inspection of the transcripts, notes and journals there was a difference in perceptions. Anna had shared how she believes trust is important in building a partnership. She related how she attempts to establish and to build that trust with families early in the year. Her methods were all very professional and appropriate and included helping parents feel like experts. However the parents who had volunteered for the study were not reflecting this trust. Their perceptions seemed to be different. They seemed to be indicating that they felt that they were perceived as not fulfilling their parental responsibilities or 'not doing enough'. A key factor may have been that both these families had not managed to attend either of the parent information nights. The partnership had not started on a solid foundation. Anna mentioned that she intended to incorporate home visits in her future job with the nursery program where she was going. She thought that this might meet families needs and provide another link to partnership building.

## ADVICE TO RESEARCHERS CONTEMPLATING A SIMILAR STUDY:

My advice to researchers who are attempting to conduct a research study on partnerships is as follows:-

1. Organize the study so as to provide for the possibility of a pilot study with one family.
2. Allow a longer period of time to do a preliminary search for candidates and be more flexible in the location of the sights. Consider the social context carefully and find ways to deal with it.
3. Consider different options for setting up the study, such as the production of a video
4. Develop a system to gain access to families without frightening them.
5. Make direct contact with possible candidates at the beginning so that communication is improved.
6. Arrange to tape toddlers in the day care setting before you start the study so that families can begin to build a trusting relationship and not see you as an 'expert' or stranger.
7. Choose the time to conduct the study when new families are beginning and when the centers are more likely to be having group meetings so that you can use this time to establish yourself.



## ADVICE TO TEACHERS IN DAYCARE TRAINING PROGRAMS:

As a result of this research experience I have managed to translate research into concrete and meaningful ways in my practical teaching. It has been a year since the aborted research study. There has been time to think, to reflect, to discuss and to read further. I have found myself changing my teaching style. I have struggled with the idea that we teach our students to follow developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms with young children but at the higher education level do we actually model it? I have increasingly moved toward a realization that adults also learn best through being actively engaged in their learning. I am drawing my adult students into more active learning, problem-solving activities rather than relying on lecturing techniques. Adults do not learn much just sitting, taking notes, memorizing and spitting out answers on multiple-choice exams. My advice to educators in daycare training programs is to find ways to develop activities that employ small group collaboration, open discussions and sharing, field observation and 'hands-on' learning activities that also offer some choice for students within the course content. Adults as with children learn better if they are interested in the subject matter. In introductory courses develop materials which engage students in identifying their values, understanding what family means. Develop material that includes discussion and exercises on poverty and its possible effects on families and the daycare setting. Set the foundation to help students identify their perceptions of parent involvement and parent collaboration so that they can begin to understand how partnerships grow and develop. In the practicum

area include learning activities that require students to actively engage in partnership building with families. The following account is how I have begun to implement some of these ideas into my teaching in an introductory course on day care services.

I begin the course with an exercise of reflection on our own value systems and concepts of families. I give the students time to think about their own family. Then they write down on a piece of paper all the people whom they consider to be part of their family. They form small groups and share their information. This helps them begin to realize that there are differences in our perceptions of families. We then discuss the concept of family from a theoretical perspective. Students then complete a 'personal experience essay', of approximately two-three pages in length. As our feelings, actions and thoughts influence our relationships with families and child care settings, it is important to reflect on our personal life experiences to help us prepare for the task of caregiving. Students relate their experiences with child rearing practices as a child, as a parent, as an educator, as a member of the community. Opinions on quality child care for young children are stated, as well as their values. They begin the process of establishing links to quality care and discuss perceived conflicts with their traditional values..

The topics of quality care and developmentally appropriate practices are introduced through discussion. Small group collaboration is used for a project approach to learning. Following this students complete a group assignment which requires them to create a poster or pamphlet to demonstrate their understanding of quality care indicators. They have the

semester to think about it, reflect together and to complete the final work in class. This collaborative project provides the students with an opportunity to be actively engaged in learning. They are constructing meaning and thus developing their knowledge. The procedure is as follows:-

The first evening of classes I present the poster/pamphlet project as one of the assignments. I share the guidelines and assessment values.

The second class the topic for discussion is quality care and developmentally appropriate practices. The students read about these topics and within small groups of three or four decide which aspect they wish to explore. They are told that they have been hired at a day care center and are needed to explain quality care and developmentally appropriate practices to the community. This idea developed when I was teaching in a Northern training program and has evolved into it's present format. I plan to expand this activity in future courses as student feedback has been positive. I will adapt the topic to include the two aspects. High achieving students have chosen on their own to do both a pamphlet and a poster because they feel that 'one leads into the other.'

The students complete the research during the term. They are given a piece of poster board to make their graphic representation. This is done in one of the last classes.

During the final class period at the end of the semester, they present the finished work to the other students. They explain what it means, the process they used and reflect on their learning and practices.



The projects are graded by me according to the set guidelines. The posters are then available to the students to take. Many students do pick them up.

The topic on parent communication focuses on types of communication but emphasizes parent collaboration. Again students are encouraged to reflect on their own concepts of parent involvement before we address this issue. They are asked "How do you feel about involving parents?" "What does parent involvement mean to you?" In small groups students read case study scenarios and then are asked to problem-solve together. They quickly realize that there are different perspectives. My role is to organize the groups, initiate interest, introduce the cases, provide class time for discussion, facilitate and attempt to push students to dig deeper, create disequilibrium. Groups share their solutions, ideas with others in the class who then respond. Students have the opportunity to reflect on their learning processes in order to develop deeper understanding of ideas. They are constructing their own knowledge which fits with a constructivist approach to learning.

In terms of the laws and regulations section of the course, students are given group in-class assignments. A simulation game is played. Students in groups of five or six are given a package of cards with statements from the regulations printed on them. Each student takes a card with one of the regulations and then explains it to the others in the group. The group must decide collectively its importance and how it would affect daily life in the center. At the end each group presents their cards to the class and places them on the master grid. The second phase of the regulations and laws

again involves a simulation game. Students are presented with different scenarios. One example is that they have just been hired to develop a new 60 space daycare centre for a specific age group. They have limited funds. They must develop the centre respecting the regulations and the indicators of quality care. They are forced to make choices and to decide on priorities. Students find this extremely difficult as there is never enough money and they must decide together. Each group then presents their scenario and explains how they came to their decisions and why.. These examples of activities for training programs are just a beginning. It would be useful to conduct future research through the use of in-depth interviews, reflective practice with other teachers in day care training programs.

## POSTSCRIPT

The dialogue continues. I hope one day to try again but next time I would use one case, that is one family and one educator. My interest in parent-educator partnerships remains strong. In November 1996 my own eighteen month old grandson began daycare. He was placed in Jake's toddler group. Jake has frequently communicated with my son and daughter-in-law and has even made some home visits as he has done with other families. They are not in a disadvantaged situation but they feel that it is reassuring to know that they are working together for what is best for their child. Jake, in his reflections after the study was completed, revealed that he intended to hold parent-educator nights at the parents' houses. He thinks this will 'give the partnership an opportunity to be more intimate'. Although the study was aborted it gives me hope that we learned from the situation and are continuing to improve our practices.



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## Appendix A

### Annotated bibliography

Balahan, N. (1992). The role of the child care professional in caring for infants, toddlers, and their families. Young Children, 47 (5), 66-71.

The author of the article asks the question:- "What's so special about child care professionals?" The author outlines three major characteristics that are important for child care professionals—experience, knowledge and personal qualities. The article supports my conceptual framework as it also touches upon the importance of interactions - planning, listening and comforting not only the infant in child care, but also the family. In addition, concrete examples are shared to support arguments. The reference to cultural sensitivity and the importance of advocacy to promote child care as a profession and to educate the public that child care is a societal issue validates my reasons for studying the question of parent - educator relationships in infant/toddler settings from an ecological perspective.

Bronfenbrenner, U., Alvarez, W. F. & Henderson, C. R. Jr. (1984). Working and Watching: Maternal employment status and parents perceptions of their three year old children. Child Development, 55 (4), 1362-1378.

In this study the authors investigate the possible effects of maternal employment on the child. They looked at preschool children but I found it relevant to my problem as I wish to gain a better understanding of whether being in daycare makes a difference. To examine parent - educator

relations it is important to understand that a parent's work situation may or may not affect how they interact with their infant/toddler. Results showed that mothers' employment may produce benefits for child-rearing, but significant costs as well. It is an important contribution to my conceptual framework as it refers to parents' exosystems.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. Developmental Psychology, 22 (6), 723-742.

This article discusses how external forces influence interactions within the family, and how the functioning of families as contexts for child development are affected. Three different environmental systems that influence the family on an external level are defined. It critically examines transitions and linkages between family and external forces such as hospitals, daycares, school, social networks, work, neighbourhoods and communities, as well as public policies that effect families and children, thus forming a basis for justifying my framework.

Denholm, C., Ferguson, R., & Pence, A. (Eds.) (1987). Professional child and youth care: The Canadian perspective. Vancouver, BC: Univ. British Columbia.

This book of essays on child care in Canada has proven to be an excellent tool for researching my problem in an ecological perspective. It presents current research findings on child care and helped to clarify my vision of the problem. It deals with family structures, family support systems, parenting and changing roles. Child care in the future is also viewed. It was



useful in helping me to connect child care with other forces that interact with child care, and helped me to make links to various factors that will affect my research.

Doherty, G. (1995). Quality matters: Excellence in early childhood programs. Don Mills, ON: Addison-Wesley.

This book blends theory and practice and promotes the concept that research should provide the foundation for determining desirable practice. It deals with quality in child care and provides up-to-date research findings in an extremely well organized manner. Each chapter stands alone but is also connected. Chapters on parenting, communication, and parent education offered current findings in the field. When I received this book this summer it started me to thinking deeply about the issue of quality in infant settings.

Ellenburg, F.C., & Lanier, N. J. (1984, May/June). Interacting effectively with parents. Childhood Education, 315-318.

In this article the authors deal with parent teacher interactions. They outline how parents feel, factors that contribute to poor communication, and how to deal with them. They point out that there are different approaches to parenting. The article builds upon the conceptual framework as it addresses the different systems in an ecological model of human development. Although written for school age level, it is transferable.

Galinsky, E. (1988). Parents and Teacher-caregivers: Sources of tension, sources of support. Young Children, 43 (3), 4-12.

The author deals with the forces that affect parent interactions-work environments, stress. As well, factors within the daycare are outlined. She offers a balanced view of both participants in child care, that is, the perceptions and needs of both the parent and the educator. The role of the administrator is discussed, which links to my framework. There are practical suggestions for strategy-building and problem-solving which could prove helpful in the field. Supports my argument for training educators.

Gonzalez-Mena, J. (1992). Taking a culturally sensitive approach in infant-toddler programs. Young Children, 47 (2), 4-9.

The author addresses the issue of conflict which is the main purpose of the article. Four outcomes to cultural conflicts are explored in infant/toddler caregiver settings. Theory is linked to concrete scenarios. This article links into the macrosystem in an ecological model.

Honig, A. (1985). High quality infant/toddler care: Issues and dilemmas. Young Children, 41 (1), 40-46.

In this article Honig considers eight key issues that challenge parents and professionals when infant group care is needed. Staff stability, educator training, people problems, adult-infant ratios, group time versus individual time, the role of language in caregiving, issues of control and power, are all handled in clear language backed up by theory. Supports my argument that caregivers need specialized knowledge in infant development for quality care.

Honig, A. (1993). Mental health for babies: What do theory and research teach us? Young Children, 69-75.

In this article Honig provides an excellent review of the literature on infant development and makes links to practice. Supports my thinking on quality, training, and also on factors that influence infant development. Fits with my framework.

Howes, C. (1989). Research in review: Infant child care. Young Children, (44) (6), 24-28.

Main purpose of the article is a critical evaluation of the evidence concerning infant child care as a risk for social and emotional development. Presents a balanced review of literature on maternal employment, mother-child attachment and caregiver-child attachments. The possible link between a child's development and family and child care supports the problem.

Howes, C., & Hamilton, C. E. (1992). Children's relationships with child care teachers: Stability and concordance with paternal attachments. Child Development, 63 (4), 867-878.

Maternal attachment and teacher-child attachment measured by Strange Situation procedures and Q set are viewed and results examined in this article. Findings add credibility to the study of interactions and being aware of influences that affect development.

Kleinfeld, J., McDiarmid, G., Grubis, S., & Parrett, W. (1983). Doing research on effective cross-cultural teaching: The teacher tale. Peabody Journal of Education, 67, 87-108.



In this article the authors examine what makes effective teachers in cross-cultural settings. I read this article when preparing to teach in a training program in an Inuit Community and found it to be supportive to my desire to use a narrative framework.

Moss, P., & Pence, A. (Ed) (1994). *Valuing quality in early childhood services: New approaches to defining quality*. New York: Teachers' College Press.

This book contains excellent articles about different countries perceptions of quality child care. The final chapter by the editors presents the proposal that it is time to develop a more inclusionary vision of quality child care.

Pence, A. (Ed) (1988). Ecological research with children and families: From concepts to methodology. New York: Teachers' College Press.

This book presents various themes connected to an ecological perspective. It contains relevant up-to-date research on child care in Canada; presents direction for the future:- daycare in context of social and public policies. Makes links to the importance of looking at and understanding the factors in the family and the daycare setting together and separately and how they affect the child. It also helped me to better understand the weak points of Bronfenbrenner's original model of human development. It proved useful in building my argument

Walsh, D. J., & King, G. (1993). Good research and bad research: Extending Zimilies' criticism. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 8 (3), 397-400.

A response to Zimilies' criticism of quantitative research. Agrees with many points but argues that the point should not be the one type of research is better than the other, but rather that certain fundamental rules must be followed in both. High standards are required for qualitative research as well. I found that it helped me feel comfortable with doing my action research. Perhaps this was not the authors' desire, but they convinced me of the need for an in-depth look at the problem.

Zimilies, H. (1993). The adoration of 'hard data': A case study of fetishism in the evaluation of infant daycare. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 8, 369-385.

The article examines techniques used to research effects of daycare on infant development. His bias is toward qualitative methods. He expresses his concern that reliance on 'hard data' quantitative techniques limits the exploration of new knowledge and understanding. He presents an argument for involving the clinician/practitioner in research as they are the people with the constant observation in natural settings. Links are established to societal changes and I was able to make connections to my research and to the conceptual framework. It helped me as a neophyte to research the field to better understand that one must be very careful in one's research.

## Appendix B

### CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS, DIRECTOR

RESEARCH PROJECT

MASTERS THESIS

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been given all information regarding the project. I agree to participate in this project with the understanding that I have the freedom to withdraw whenever I feel. I understand that the information/data collected through this research project will be used for the intended purposes of research. I understand that I am not being paid for my participation and am doing it of my own free will.

I give my consent for my child, \_\_\_\_\_, being of minor age to be a part of this study. However I understand that the name of my child in any written material will be changed in order to respect confidentiality.



I agree to participate and to have my child participate in videotaping sessions during the project. I agree to interviews, conversations, sessions to be audiotaped and then to be transcribed.

I understand that my journal entries will also be used for the study.

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(signature of participant)

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(date)

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(witness)

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(date)